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# **Valentin Rasputin the Conservative**

**Charlotte Cecily Fox**

A Dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the award of the degree of MPhil Russian Studies in the Faculty of Arts, School of Modern Languages, September 2018.

**24352 words**

## Abstract

Rasputin has experienced great popularity in Russia in recent years. An obvious explanation for his revival is the conservative-nationalist turn in Russia, among both the political class and the electorate, which has transformed the kind of ideas found in Rasputin's work - anti-materialism; love of home; concern over the consequences of the spread of liberal conceptions of the family and attitudes to religion - from apparent anachronism into a powerful and persuasive political vision. Celebrated as a voice of opposition during the post-Thaw Soviet Union, then rejected by liberal critics in the 1990s as a mouthpiece of chauvinism, has Rasputin's perspective finally found its way to power? This dissertation studies Valentin Rasputin as a Russian conservative, examining how that conservatism is expressed in all six of Rasputin's short novels (*Den'gii dlia Marii* (1967), *Poslednii srok* (1970), *Zhivi i pomni* (1974), *Proshchanie s Materoi* (1976), *Pozhar* (1985) and the most recent, and little studied in the West, *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* (2004)) as a means of understanding better the resurgent appeal of this worldview not only in Putin's Russia, but throughout the world.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Rajendra Chitnis, for his continued support, guidance and patience. Thank you also to Jeremy Foster, without whose support this work would not have been possible.

### **Author's declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Charlotte Fox

DATE: 14 September 2018

### **Note on transliteration, translation and references**

I have used the Simplified Library of Congress transliterating style with some changes: I have transliterated ë as e and ѣ as i, and I have used a single apostrophe (') for both hard and soft signs.

Translations are my own.

For guidance on referencing, I used the third edition of the Modern Humanities Research Association style guide which is available online at <<http://www.mhra.org.uk/pdf/MHRA-Style-Guide-3rd-Edn.pdf>>

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## INTRODUCTION

It would have seemed remarkable to scholars in the late 1990s that we would be returning to study Valentin Rasputin in 2017 as a crucial figure in contemporary Russian literature, and not just as a once important author of the Soviet period. And yet, Rasputin has experienced great popularity in Russia in recent years with the republication of his work, the inclusion of his work in the school curriculum, various stage and screen productions and a prestigious funeral. There has also been a renewed interest in his work amongst Russian scholars, particularly those working in universities in Siberia. An obvious explanation for his revival is the conservative-nationalist turn in Russia, among both the political class and the electorate, which has transformed the kind of ideas found in Rasputin's work - anti-materialism; love of home; concern over the consequences of the spread of liberal conceptions of the family and attitudes to religion - from apparent anachronism into a powerful and persuasive political vision. Celebrated as a voice of opposition during the post-Thaw Soviet Union, then rejected by liberal critics in the 1990s as a mouthpiece of chauvinism, has Rasputin's perspective finally found its way to power? This dissertation studies Valentin Rasputin as a Russian conservative, examining how that conservatism is expressed in all six of Rasputin's short novels, from *Den'gi dlia Marii* (1967) to *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* (2004), as a means of understanding better the resurgent appeal of this worldview not only in Putin's Russia, but throughout the world.

### Life and Critical Reception

Valentin Rasputin was born in 1937 and grew up in the Siberian village of Atalanka on the Angara river, which features prominently in his fiction.<sup>1</sup> He attended university in Irkutsk

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<sup>1</sup> Teresa Polowy, *The Novellas of Valentin Rasputin* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1989) p.2



and, upon graduating in 1959, worked as a journalist for some years.<sup>2</sup> He was accepted into the Writers' Union in 1965 upon the recommendation of Vladimir Chivilikhim and became a full-time writer in 1967 following the success of *Den'gii dlia Marii*, which explores the breakdown of the village community as well as its residual strengths.<sup>3</sup> Rasputin considers *Poslednii srok* (1970), in which he charts the last days of an elderly villager's life and her relationship with her children, his most important work, though it was for *Zhivi i pomni* (1974), about the secret return of a war deserter to his hometown, that he was awarded the USSR State Prize for Literature in 1977. *Proshchanie s Materoi* (1976), which laments the flooding of a Siberian town to make way for the building of a hydroelectric dam, provoked much critical discussion in both the USSR and abroad because it was perceived to criticise Soviet industrialisation policy in rural Russia as destructive to both human beings and the environment. Rasputin's own native village was itself flooded in connection with the establishment of the Bratsk hydroelectric dam.<sup>4</sup> Rasputin's output during the late 1970s and early 1980s consisted mostly of essays, though he returned to his earlier themes with *Pozhar* (1985), which serves almost as a sequel to *Proshchanie s Materoi*, depicting life in a settlement town to which Rasputin's characters have relocated following the flooding of another village. In all of the short novels that Rasputin published during the Soviet era, the author depicts regrettably the decline of the peasant village and the associated way of life led by its older inhabitants. In his sorrowful accounts of the breakdown of community values and traditions, his treatment of moral questions, and his exploration of God, death and the metaphysical, Rasputin presents his reader with ideas and values that move beyond matter. These transcendent qualities are contrasted with a Soviet society in which a consumerist culture has emerged along with a preoccupation with the body and a focus on economics and production numbers over sustainability. Rasputin's final short novel, *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, serves as a continuation of his earlier works and themes, responding to the chaotic post-Soviet Russian world, which to him represents an even worse form of materialism.

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<sup>2</sup> David C. Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1986) p.13

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>4</sup> Polowy, p.5

Critics, both Russian and non-Russian, identify *derevenskaia proza* (Village Prose) as one of the most important and most artistically successful literary trends of the late Soviet period. Porter asserts that it began 'in the late 1950s as a challenge to established literary norms.'<sup>5</sup> In terms of subject matter, Village Prose, including the work of Rasputin, appeared oppositional; Nefagina believed Rasputin's writing was 'pierced with a hunger for truth' but that this truth was 'not very 'comfortable' (*udobnyi*) for any government.'<sup>6</sup> Porter also lists a number of reasons that Rasputin was a 'very unlikely candidate for any elevated position in Soviet letters':

He writes about the victims of Soviet power rather than about fully integrated members of Soviet society. There is a strong undertow of religious interest in many of his works. His overt misgivings about the processes of urbanisation and technological progress put him at odds with Soviet policies. His avowed nationalism [...] may appear embarrassingly naked in a country officially committed to Marxism.<sup>7</sup>

At a time when sanctioned literature was expected to serve the prevailing Party ideology, it is therefore unsurprising that Village Prose was more generally criticised for having 'little to do with the goals and coordinates of Socialist Realism.'<sup>8</sup> Village Prose was, however, praised early on for its artistic quality. The Village Prose writers' use of dialogue, interior monologue, and *skaz* narration brought 'authenticity and sincerity' to rural literature,<sup>9</sup> at a time when kolkhoz literature was considered to have been 'almost completely reduced to state propaganda.'<sup>10</sup> Soviet critics also praised village characters for their commendable qualities - 'hard work, loyalty, unselfishness, devotion to the land, powers of endurance' - and for their patriotic support of the war effort.<sup>11</sup> Porter recognises a similar justification for Rasputin's accommodation within the Soviet Union: 'his convincing portrayal of loyal, stoic, brave and tolerant Russian peasants is of more ideological use than that of educated youngsters,

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Porter, *Four Contemporary Russian Writers* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989) p.50

<sup>6</sup> G. L. Nefagina, 'Kategoriiia svobody v povestiakh V. Rasputina i V. Bykova' in *Tvorchestvo V. G. Rasputina v sotsiokul'turnom i esteticheskom kontekste epokhi: Kollektivnaia monografiia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo prometej, 2012) p.164

<sup>7</sup> Porter, pp.45-6

<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) p.85

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>10</sup> Deming Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature Since Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p.218

<sup>11</sup> Parthé, p.85

ostensibly committed to “progress”, but with their sights set on the big city and Western values.’<sup>12</sup> Later, in the early 1980s, a leading émigré Soviet critic, Yuri Maltsev, condemned Rasputin and some other village writers as ‘intermediate writers’ whose work was damned by the fact that it was officially published in the Soviet Union and could not therefore be both good and true.<sup>13</sup> Porter argues that Maltsev’s view was provocative given the ‘virtual universal praise’ that Rasputin had attracted for the quality of his writing.<sup>14</sup> Rasputin’s position as a favoured writer is supported by Gillespie who wrote in 1986 that Rasputin had been recognised as ‘one of the foremost literary figures in the Soviet Union’, with an ‘almost universal acclaim.’<sup>15</sup> Constance Link, writing in 1983, asserted that Rasputin was ‘considered the undisputed master of Village Prose, if not the greatest Russian writer alive today.’<sup>16</sup> It is also important to note that his status in the USSR was helped by the fact that he was among those sanctioned writers whose work was given attention internationally.

Towards the end of the 1980s, however, critical responses to Village Prose were divided along broader conservative-liberal lines and centred on the link between rural literature and the rise of Russian chauvinism, particularly with regard to the nationalist group, *Pamiat’*. *Pamiat’* was controversial for being an openly anti-Semitic Russian nationalist extremist organisation.<sup>17</sup> Rasputin publicly defended *Pamiat’* on a number of occasions, both in the USSR and abroad: in articles for *Nash sovremennik*, in a speech at the 5th congress of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture, in an interview with Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* and at a conference in Amsterdam in 1988 when he stressed the importance of the ‘recovery of memory’ for all Russians.<sup>18</sup> He also signed the ‘Letter of Russian Writers’ which was published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1990 which

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<sup>12</sup> Porter, p.46

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.13

<sup>15</sup> Gillespie, p.1

<sup>16</sup> Constance Ann Link, ‘Symbolism of the Sacred: The Novels of Valentin Rasputin’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1983) <<https://search-proquest-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/docview/303266167?pq-origsite=primo>> [accessed 24 April 2018] (p.1)

<sup>17</sup> For more information see the chapter on Neo-Fascism in Judith Devlin, *Slavophiles and Commissars: Enemies of Democracy in Modern Russia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) pp.34-60

<sup>18</sup> Simon Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature: The Case of Nash sovremennik 1981-91* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p.109; Parthé, pp.96, 176

'blamed the Jews and the "Zionists" for most of the misfortunes which have befallen the Russian people.'<sup>19</sup> Parthé, however, argues that no xenophobic or anti-Semitic statements were expressed in the Village Prose works of Astafiev, Belov and Rasputin.<sup>20</sup> Hosking agrees that in the Village Prose works of the late 1970s, there is no overt Russian chauvinism but there is 'potential espousal of the cause of old Russia.'<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it would be wrong to identify rural literature as the single motivating factor in the rise of Russian chauvinistic nationalism. Parthé cites among other reasons for this rise the 'backlash against [...] movements for independence, [...] residual Russian xenophobia, [...] the pro-Russian feelings surrounding the celebration of the millenium of Russian Orthodoxy in 1988 [and] the collapse of the economy.'<sup>22</sup> Rasputin, who is not alone amongst Russian writers for displaying xenophobia, has been widely criticised in the USSR and in the West (among émigré writers too) for public statements defending *Pamiat'*. We see both chauvinism and xenophobia in Rasputin's later short novels, *Pozhar* and *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, but recent history, in the UK and USA as well as Russia, has shown that it is a mistake for liberal critics simply to reject these attitudes as wrong, without examining their motivations and the extent of their resonance among readers.

A substantial amount of Western scholarship has been focused on the work of Valentin Rasputin with a number of influential works being written in the 1980s and early 1990s. The focus in Western scholarship on the artistic aspects of Rasputin's writing shows that reducing literary analysis to the author's politics is a gross oversimplification. Constance Ann Link's doctoral dissertation *Symbolism of the Sacred: The Novellas of Valentin Rasputin* (1983) gives an illuminating analysis of the religious, spiritual, moral and symbolic aspects of Rasputin's writing with reference to both Orthodox and folk tradition. David Gillespie's *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose* (1986) was the first monograph published in English on Rasputin and offers a valuable preliminary exposition of the biographical and literary context in which Rasputin was writing. Gillespie situates Rasputin's work firmly within Village Prose, but also provides thoughtful comparisons to the youth and urban prose

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<sup>19</sup> Galya Diment, 'Valentin Rasputin and Siberian Nationalism', *World Literature Today*, 67.1 (1993) 69-73 (p.72)

<sup>20</sup> Parthé, p.xii

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction Since Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980) p.82

<sup>22</sup> Parthé, p.97

movements which arose in the 1960s. Teresa Polowy's subsequent monograph *The Novellas of Valentin Rasputin. Genre, Language and Style* (1989) is another important contribution to Rasputin scholarship providing an analysis of his often difficult prose style, his use of language devices and structure. Polowy gives a particularly detailed analysis of Rasputin's use of standard Russian and Siberian dialect and the blend of Soviet jargon and folksy figurative language in *Zhivi i pomni* and *Proshchanie s Materoi*. Once again, this analysis is offered in order to draw contrasts and comparisons between Rasputin's work and traditional Village Prose. Kathleen Parthé's *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (1992) defines the parameters of the Village Prose genre as a whole and interrogates a range of works according to their use and representation of the village, the home, nature, time and native language. Parthé identifies the binary oppositions that exist along the spectrum of Soviet Russian literature on rural themes with kolkhoz literature celebrating youth, revolution and a radiant future contrasted with Village Prose celebrating the elderly, tradition and a radiant past. In her analysis of other writers' works, Parthé explores the themes of memory and loss in Rasputin's short story 'Vniz i vverkh po techeniiu' (1972) and touches on *Pozhar* as a post-Village Prose work. These assessments are made in order to provide examples of certain aspects of Village Prose and post-Village Prose works and thus do not leave the reader with any overarching interpretation of Rasputin's work.

Whilst all these scholars view Rasputin as one of the best and most important writers of one of the most prominent literary genres of the post-Stalin Soviet period, these scholars, writing in the 1980s and early 1990s could offer no sense of the significance that Rasputin might have in the post-Soviet period, or indeed of his significance aside from Village Prose. In addition, they only analyse in detail the first four of Rasputin's short novels (for which, admittedly, Rasputin is most famous) with Gillespie and Polowy writing only briefly about *Pozhar*. None of these scholarly works covers Rasputin's final short novel *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* which was published later in 2004. A number of contemporary Russian scholars, mostly working at Siberian universities, have written theses on Rasputin's work in recent years. Bol'shakova (2012), Brazhnikov (2012) and Maksina (2012) are among those addressing the moral-philosophical and aesthetic aspects of Rasputin's work through analyses of his mythopoetics - discussion for which there was little room within Soviet Russian criticism - and they do write about *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*. It appears time for a

reappraisal of Rasputin's work to be conducted now which moves beyond the Soviet and Village Prose context of his writing, especially given the acclaim that Rasputin has been accorded in the post-Soviet and contemporary Russian period. Rasputin's work would lend itself well today to an ecocritical reading. Such a reading would be helpfully illuminated by a reflection on Rasputin's fiction in conjunction with his essays, many of which are written with the ecological cause in mind, but which this dissertation is unfortunately unable to cover due to the necessary constraints of space and time. Rasputin's work could also be suitably studied in light of other critical methods that have emerged in recent years - a literary anthropological or ethnographic approach, for example, would likely be interesting - which only emphasises the enduring significance of his writing. This study was prompted by an interest in the contemporary cultural significance of Rasputin.

## **Popular Reception**

Valentin Rasputin holds an important place in the contemporary Russian literary canon, demonstrated notably by his place in the school curriculum. Education in Russia has undergone a number of reforms since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and great importance is placed upon the role of education in contributing to the formation of the younger generations' Russian national identity. The 2010 Federal State Educational Standard for Basic General Education, for example, states that the 'personal results' of education should include the following (among others):

the fostering of Russian civic identity: patriotism, respect for the Fatherland, the past and present of the multinational people of Russia; awareness of their ethnicity, knowledge of the history, language and culture of their people, their region and the foundations of the cultural heritage of the peoples of Russia and humanity; assimilation of the humanistic, democratic and traditional values of multinational Russian society; the nurturing of a sense of responsibility and duty to the motherland.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> 'Prikaz Ministerstva obrazovaniia u nauki Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 17 dekabria 2010 g. N1897 "Ob utverzhdenii federal'nogo gosudarstvennogo obrazovatel'nogo standart-a osnovnogo obshchego obrazovaniia"', *Rossiskaia gazeta*, 19 December 2010 <<https://rg.ru/2010/12/19/obrstandart-site-dok.html>> [accessed 14 August 2018]

The teaching of literature, in particular, is given an important role within education, with the 2015 Model Programme for Literature for Russian classes 5-9 describing literature as 'one of the basic cultural values of the people (*narod*)', and stating one of the aims of studying literature as 'ensuring cultural self-identification.'<sup>24</sup> It is therefore significant that works written by Rasputin have been included on the compulsory and recommended reading lists of every literature syllabus update since 1991. Rasputin's short story 'Uroki frantsuzskogo' (1973) is suggested for students in classes 5-9, whilst *Den'gi dlia Marii*, *Zhivi i pomni* and *Proshchanie s Materoi* are listed for students in classes 10-11. Mikhail Pavlovets, writing in 2016, noted that the 'literature of recent decades' section of every curriculum since 1991 is made up exclusively of Village Prose writers who are understood as 'direct heirs of the classical line of Russian literature.'<sup>25</sup> Karin Sarsenov, comparing the 2004 and 2010 curriculums, also argues that the exclusion of urban prose writers in the latter curriculum alongside the stronger presence given to village authors who '[praised] simple village life in covert nationalistic terms' show that 'an effort has been made to emphasise literature's nationalistic aspect.'<sup>26</sup> Thus, the inclusion of Rasputin in the school curriculum can be interpreted as a way of including literature which is deemed to be both of quality and as serving a suitably patriotising function.

Beyond education, Rasputin has also come to occupy a significant position in the Russian popular imagination. Following his death on March 14th 2015, Patriarch Kirill assigned Rasputin to the category of 'great' writers, a category reserved for those who 'leave a special mark in the history of literature, in the history of thought and in the spiritual history of their people.'<sup>27</sup> Patriarch Kirill called Rasputin one of the greatest Russian writers of the twentieth century because his work helps people to 'take on a different perspective' and to

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<sup>24</sup> 'Primernaia osnovnaia obrazovatel'naia programma osnovnogo obrazovaniia', 8 April 2015 <[https://минобрнауки.рф/проекты/413/файл/4587/ПОП\\_ООО\\_reestr\\_2015\\_01.doc](https://минобрнауки.рф/проекты/413/файл/4587/ПОП_ООО_reestr_2015_01.doc)> [accessed 14 August 2018] p.34

<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Pavlovets, 'Shkol'nyi kanon kak pole bitvy: kupel' bez rebenka', *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 5 (2016) 125-145 <<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2016/5/shkolnyj-kanon-kak-pole-bitvy-kupel-bez-rebenka-pr.html>> [accessed 14 August 2018]

<sup>26</sup> Karin Sarsenov, 'The Literature Curriculum in Russia: Cultural Nationalism vs. The Cultural Turn', *Culture Unbound*, 2 (2010) 495-513 (p.505)

<sup>27</sup> 'Patriarkh Kirill o Valentine Rasputine', *God literature*, 18 March 2015 <<https://godliterary.ru/events-post/patriarkh-kirill-o-valentine-rasputin>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

raise their perspective above the everyday. Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev posted his condolences on Facebook on March 15th describing Rasputin as a ‘classic of Russian prose, a true patriot.’<sup>28</sup> Russian President Putin attended the farewell ceremony that was held for the author on March 17th 2015 at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow so that members of the public could pay their final respects.<sup>29</sup> Rasputin’s funeral service was presided over by Patriarch Kirill the next day, with RIA Novosti reporting live at the start and end times of the service.<sup>30</sup> A second farewell ceremony held in Irkutsk was attended by around 15,000 people.<sup>31</sup> As a point of comparison, Solzhenitsyn’s funeral at Donskoi Monastery in 2008 was attended by then Russian President, Dmitri Medvedev, and then Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin with a service that ‘bore all the hallmarks of a state funeral, including a military band and a gun salute.’<sup>32</sup>

Rasputin has also inspired a range of cultural activities. A large number of theatrical productions of Rasputin’s works have been performed since the beginning of his literary career to the present day. Just in the last fifteen years there have been at least ten productions of various works performed by theatre companies from all over Russia and an exhibition was held at the A. A. Bakhrushin Theatre Museum in Moscow in 2017 to showcase such performances and to screen the seven film versions of his work.<sup>33</sup> Had he still been alive, Rasputin would have celebrated his 80th birthday in March 2017 and a press conference was held by *Rossiskaia gazeta* on March 13th 2017 to announce a

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<sup>28</sup> Dmitri Medvedev, Facebook post, 15 March 2015, <<https://www.facebook.com/Dmitry.Medvedev/photos/a.10150348022656851/10152623573496851/?type=3&theater>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>29</sup> ‘Putin pribyl na tseremoniiu proshchaniia s Valentinom Rasputinyim’, *RIA novosti*, 17 March 2015 <<https://ria.ru/religion/20150317/1053012143.html>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>30</sup> ‘Otpevanie Valentina Rasputina nachalos’ v khrame Khrista Spasitelia’, *RIA novosti*, 18 March 2015 <<https://ria.ru/religion/20150318/1053148114.html>> [accessed 14 November 2017]; ‘Otpevanie Valentina Rasputina zavershilos’ v Moskve’, *RIA novosti*, 18 March 2015 <<https://ria.ru/religion/20150318/1053168267.html>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>31</sup> ‘Okolo 15 tysiach chelovek prishli prostit’sia s Rasputinyim v Irkutske’, *RIA novosti*, 19 March 2015 <<https://ria.ru/culture/20150319/1053347767.html>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>32</sup> Anil Dawar, ‘Solzhenitsyn buried after Russian Orthodox ceremony’, *Guardian*, 6 August 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/06/russia>> [accessed 14 September 2018]

<sup>33</sup> ‘Teatral’nye postanovki’, *Muzei V. G. Rasputina* <<http://vgrasputin.ru/teatralnye-postanovki>> [accessed 14 November 2017]; ‘“Vsiu zhizn’ ia pisal liubov’ k Rossii.” Narodnye dramy Valentina Rasputina na tsene i na ekrane. K 80-letiiu so dnia pozhdeniia pisatel’ia’, *Gosudarstvennyi tsentral’nyi teatral’nyi muzei imeni A. A. Bakhrushina* <<http://www.gctm.ru/event/vsyu-zhizn-ya-pisal-lyubov-k-rossii-narodnye-dramy-valentina-rasputina-na-stsene-i-na-ekrane-k-80-letiyu-so-dnya-rozhdeniya-pisatelya/>> [accessed 14 November 2017]



comprehensive programme of commemorative events organised by Putin's advisor for culture, Vladimir Tolstoj, the director of the State Literary Museum, Dmitrii Bak, the Governor of Irkutsk Oblast', Sergei Levchenko, and film director Sergei Miroshnichenko.<sup>34</sup> It was planned that all school children would have a special lesson on Rasputin's work on March 15th; radio station '*Kniga*' was to air a broadcast dedicated to Rasputin; the Russian State Library's Pashkov House (which houses most of Rasputin's archive) was to hold a memorial evening titled '*Iz glubin v glubiny*' with discussion and readings of Rasputin's fiction and journalistic writings; and the Russian State Library's Blue Hall was to host an exhibition titled '*Zhivaia dusha Rossii*' curated in collaboration with the Irkutsk Oblast' Museum of Local History and displaying manuscripts, photographs and other materials that had not been displayed before. An editorial council was also set up in March with a view to publishing a collected works of Rasputin's writings but work on this is not expected to be complete for 4-5 years. The television channel '*Rossiia Kul'tura*' put on a number of shows in celebration of Rasputin over what would have been his birthday weekend, including an episode of a literary talk-show '*Igra v biser s Igorem Volginym*' dedicated to discussion of Rasputin's work. This talk-show invites 4 'heroes' (in this episode critic, Igor Sikhikh, journalist, Aleksandr Kazintsev, writer, Sergei Esin, and leading representative of a new wave of village prose, Roman Senchin) To discuss the best examples of world literature in order to understand who and what we are.<sup>35</sup> The channel also aired the documentary film '*Reka zhizni*' in which Rasputin journeys down the Angara River exploring the fate of rural Russian villages in contemporary Siberia, as well as screenings of film adaptations of Rasputin's fiction and a TV adaptation of the Irkutsk Theatre's production of *Poslednii srok*.<sup>36</sup> The V. G. Rasputin Museum was also opened in a traditional wooden building in Irkutsk on 15th March 2017 containing a memorial collection including personal belongings, household items, photographs, documents, manuscripts and books.<sup>37</sup> The museum also holds academic

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<sup>34</sup> Natalia, Sokolova 'Nam ne khvataet golosa Rasputina: Kak Rossiia otmetit 80-letie pisatel'ia', *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 13 March 2017 <<https://rg.ru/2017/03/13/kakimi-sobytiiami-otmetiat-iubilej-pisatel'ia-valentina-rasputina.html>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>35</sup> 'O proekte "Igra v biser" s Igorem Volginim', *Rossia-Kultura* <[http://tvkultura.ru/brand/show/brand\\_id/20921/](http://tvkultura.ru/brand/show/brand_id/20921/)> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>36</sup> 'K 80-letiiu so dnia pozhdeniia Valentina Rasputina', *Rossia-K* <[http://tvkultura.ru/article/show/article\\_id/169507/brand\\_id/28994/type\\_id/2/](http://tvkultura.ru/article/show/article_id/169507/brand_id/28994/type_id/2/)> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>37</sup> 'Istoria muzeia', *Muzei V. G. Rasputina* <<http://vgrasputin.ru/istorija-muzeja>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

conferences relating to the study of Rasputin and is collaborating with the Centre for Russian Language, Folklore and Ethnography on a state assisted project titled 'Sibirskaiia atlantida Valentina Rasputina' which will result in the completion of an interactive electronic audio-visual dictionary to be displayed in the museum to help visitors to familiarise themselves with the language of Siberia.<sup>38</sup> It is clear that, within the political, religious and cultural establishment, Rasputin is remembered as a valuable Russian writer whose work continues to be promoted through the various commemorations held in his name.

For the public, Rasputin's appeal today appears to be more emotional than intellectual. One of the best examples of this subjectivity can be found in a post dated 1st September 2017 on an event page on the Russian social networking site 'VKontakte' set up to promote the Irkutsk Academic Dramaturgical Theatre's performance of *Proshchanie s Materoi* at the Malyi Theatre in Moscow in October 2017. The post describes Rasputin as such:

Valentin Rasputin is a loyal son of the Russian land, a defender of her honor. His talent is akin to a holy source capable of quenching the thirst of millions of Russians. Having tasted the books of Valentin Grigorievich, having learned the taste of his truth, you no longer want to settle for less sophisticated literature. His bread is bitter and without frills. It is freshly-baked and odourless. It is not able to become stale because it has no statute of limitations (*srok davnosti*). Such a product has been baked in Siberia from time immemorial, and it was called eternal bread. So the works of Valentin Rasputin contain unshakable, eternal values. Spiritual and moral baggage, a burden which not only does not take, but also gives strength.<sup>39</sup>

The flowery language used by the theatre representative who authored this post, as well as the special role that the representative assigns to Rasputin's writing in nourishing the Russian nation, is far from the objective analysis of scholarly literature and only goes to emphasise further the emotional appeal of Rasputin's work in contemporary Russia.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Irkutskii oblastnoi kraevedcheskii musei poluchit grant Prezidenta Rossii', *Irkutskii oblastnoi kraevedcheskii musei* <<https://museum-irkutsk.com/news/irkutskiy-oblastnoy-kraevedcheskiy-muzey-poluchit-grant-prezidenta-rossii>> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>39</sup> "'Proshchanie s Materoi'. Moskva. Malyi teatr' VKontakte page <[https://vk.com/event147817866?z=photo-147817866\\_456239031%2Falbum-147817866\\_00%2Frev](https://vk.com/event147817866?z=photo-147817866_456239031%2Falbum-147817866_00%2Frev)> [accessed 14 November 2017]

Rasputin's popular appeal can be explained by his reputation as a staunch patriot which is made all the more profitable by his blurred allegiance to both Siberia and Russia. Deming Brown recognises in Village Prose more generally an 'interest in Russia's national origins.'<sup>40</sup> Brown adds that village writers 'tended to view the peasant as a last repository of precious traits of the national character' and that their interest in the peasant and his way of life was related to 'a nationalistic quest for the ultimate sources of the Russian spirit.'<sup>41</sup> That Prime Minister Medvedev referred to Rasputin as a patriot following the author's death is significant given the importance placed upon patriotism in Putin's Russia. In 2015, Putin described patriotism as the 'sacred duty' of all Russians and as being a 'moral guideline' for young Russians, and in 2016 the President '[declared] patriotism Russia's only national idea.'<sup>42</sup> Porter, however, notes that the patriotism displayed by Rasputin in interviews and in his shorter fiction writing from the 1970s and 1980s can 'easily transform itself into Russian, or more particularly, Siberian, nationalism.'<sup>43</sup> This view is supported by Diment who argues that 'Rasputin's fervent Siberian nationalism is indeed an essential part of virtually all his literary works.'<sup>44</sup> Whilst Polowy does not call Rasputin a Siberian patriot or nationalist, the in-depth analysis that she conducts in her monograph of Rasputin's use of Siberian dialect and vivid descriptions of the Soviet countryside give a sense of Rasputin's love for Siberia. Both Gerald Mikkelson and David Gillespie identify Rasputin as a Siberian patriot and suggest that there is a separation in his work between Siberian Russia and European Russia.<sup>45</sup> A sense of the emergence of a conscious Siberian regional identity is present too in contemporary popular representations of Rasputin's work. For example, the Irkutsk Academic Dramaturgical Theatre believes itself to have a particularly deep connection with Rasputin and his work and stresses the authenticity of its productions because of their

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<sup>40</sup> Brown, p.71

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp.220-1

<sup>42</sup> 'Putin Declares Patriotism Russia's Only National Idea', *Moscow Times*, 4 February 2016 <<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/putin-declares-patriotism-russias-only-national-idea-51705>> [accessed 14 August 2018]

<sup>43</sup> Porter, pp.44-5

<sup>44</sup> Diment, p.71

<sup>45</sup> Gillespie, David, 'A Paradise Lost Siberia and its Writers, 1960 to 1990', *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. by Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) 255-273 (pp.256, 258)

shared Siberian heritage.<sup>46</sup> On a 'Vkontakte' event page set up in advance of the theatre's sell-out performance of *Proshchanie s Materoi* in Moscow in October 2017, a post from 10th June 2017 distinguished between Moscow and Irkutsk (Irkutsk is described as the 'capital of Eastern Siberia' and the user writes 'from our capital to yours') whilst a post from 5th October 2017 called the performance a gift from the Siberian theatre to Muscovites.<sup>47</sup> The same post describes the performance as having 'absorbed part of the Siberian soul', also stating that it will help residents of the capital 'to escape from the rapid pace of life in the big city and look deep into themselves, into the history of their own kind and think about the future.' Writing in relation to the Soviet period, Porter interestingly reveals that 'it has been suggested that Rasputin (together with Viktor Astaf'iev) has been allowed more freedom in his depiction of Soviet shortcomings, because his Siberian nationalism is particularly convenient, given that China has claims on Eastern Siberia.'<sup>48</sup> The same fear of a Chinese takeover of Siberia remains relevant today and provides further justification for the promotion of Rasputin's work. Reference is even made to the growing number of agricultural fields located in Siberia but owned by the Chinese in Rasputin's *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*: towards the end of the short novel, Tamara Ivanovna asks rhetorically whether it is not the Chinese growing the cabbages in the cultivated countryside fields.<sup>49</sup> It might also be questioned how far contemporary Moscow, the centre, is now employing a Siberian identity for a Russian one, for example, in the way that publishing images of President Putin hunting on holiday in Siberia, which borrow from Siberian ideals of masculinity and proximity to nature, has become a regular public relations strategy.

Whether Russian patriot or Siberian nationalist, Rasputin's love of home is but one aspect of his work (though admittedly a very important one). Rasputin explores the notion of a passing way of life and addresses broader moral and philosophical questions regarding the breakdown of community values, a waning connection to nature and ancestral traditions, the consequences of technological progress and man's search for his place in the world. This

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<sup>46</sup> "'Proshchanie s Materoi" na tsene Malogo teatra v Moskve', *Irkutskoe zemliachestvo "Baikal"*, 22 July 2017 <<http://baikal-irkzem.ru/about/news/6512/>> [accessed 14 August 2018]

<sup>47</sup> "'Proshchanie s Materoi". Moskva. Maliy teatr' VKontakte page <[https://vk.com/event147817866?w=wall-147817866\\_9%2Fall](https://vk.com/event147817866?w=wall-147817866_9%2Fall)> [accessed 14 November 2017]

<sup>48</sup> Porter, p.45

<sup>49</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana' in his *Zhivi i pomni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, 2016) pp.698-862 (p.860)

dissertation aims to define Rasputin's broader conservative worldview in order to illuminate Rasputin's status and ideological relevance in Putin's Russia, which is a conservative country in which politicians have been able to successfully exploit the same kinds of noble values present in Rasputin's work.<sup>50</sup> This exploitation is seen, for example, in Patriarch Kirill's and Putin's extolling the importance of the family, despite the President being divorced himself; or in President Putin being photographed in the Siberian countryside and naming 2017 the Russian year of ecology, despite being surrounded by an oligarchy that owes its wealth to the exploitation of natural resources; or in proclamations on the value of patriotism, despite Moscow's status as a global business capital.

## Russian Conservatism

A long tradition of conservative styles of thought exists in Russia. Derek Offord and William Leatherbarrow write in their introduction to *A History of Russian Thought* that there has been a tendency by scholars to 'play down the extent and strength of Russian conservative thought in the classical period' in favour of emphasising liberal and radical strains of thinking, yet 'there is little justification for dismissing Russian conservative thought as mere obscurantism.'<sup>51</sup> Whilst the works of Karamzin and the Wisdom Lovers of Alexander I's reign, and of the defenders of the theory of 'Official Nationality' propagated under Nicholas I all represent early examples of Russian conservative thought, Slavophilism was, according to Riasanovsky, 'the fullest and most authentic expression of Romantic thought in Russia.'<sup>52</sup> Formulated by Alexei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky and Konstantin Aksakov, Slavophile ideology was a reaction against 'Western rationalism and against the formalism, legalism, individualism, and atomism it was supposed to cultivate.'<sup>53</sup> The Slavophiles presented the

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<sup>50</sup> Walter Laqueur, 'Moscow's Modernization Dilemma: Is Russia Charting a New Foreign Policy?', *Foreign Affairs*, 89.6 (2010) 153–160 (p.156)

<sup>51</sup> *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. By William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.9

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in William Leatherbarrow, 'Conservatism in the age of Alexander I and Nicholas I', *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. By William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp.95–115 (p.108)

<sup>53</sup> Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) p.21

'Russian peasant commune, the *obshchina*, as an alternative social and moral organisation.'<sup>54</sup> Their doctrine was motivated by an 'essentially spiritual worldview structured on Orthodox Christianity.'<sup>55</sup> The Slavophiles came from the gentry class and it is thought that their writings were motivated by a sense of 'alienation of part of the nobility from the bureaucratic regime' which they believed had become 'tyrannical, and un-Russian,' as a result of the Petrine reforms and the spread of European Enlightenment ideas during the reign of Catherine the Great.<sup>56</sup> They drew, somewhat ironically, on German Romanticism, to present a 'vision of the true Russia, which was based on the nation, the people, and the land.' Rasputin's representation of communal village life has much in common with Kireevsky's 'idealised' vision of the Russian commune, as shall be seen in the chapter on community.<sup>57</sup> However, their conservative worldviews differ in other ways. Whilst both the Slavophiles and Rasputin are in their own ways reacting to great changes in Russia as a result of the application of liberal ideas of rationalism and universalism, Slavophilism, constructed by nobles, represents, according to Walicki, a 'conservative utopianism' which is rooted in a past ideal and which both Leatherbarrow and Rabow-Edling believe calls for change.<sup>58</sup> Rasputin, who came from a rural peasant village (though did go on to become university educated), writes as a regretful witness to the passing of a way of life of which he himself has been a part, without necessarily offering radical solutions. Moreover, the presence of various folk beliefs in his work would not have been tolerated by the devoutly Orthodox Slavophiles, and particularly Kireevsky, who viewed paganism as a rationalistic and individualistic force causing social disintegration.<sup>59</sup>

Native Soil conservatism (*pochvennichestvo*) emerged in the mid-1860s in the thought of Grigorev, Strakhov and Dostoevsky as a response to Chernyshevsky's radical nihilism.<sup>60</sup> Dowler writes that *pochvennichestvo* represented the 'fullest expression' of the philosophy

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.21

<sup>55</sup> Leatherbarrow, p.108

<sup>56</sup> Rabow-Edling, p.20

<sup>57</sup> Leatherbarrow, p.111

<sup>58</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979) p.107; Leatherbarrow, p.111; Rabow-Edling, p.2

<sup>59</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. By Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) p.138

<sup>60</sup> Wayne Dowler, *Dostoevsky, Grigor'ev, and Native Soil Conservatism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1945) p.12

of reconciliation between the intelligentsia and the people (*narod*).<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the Native Soil conservatives aimed to 'effect a reconciliation between the 50 million 'simple' Russians and the 100,000 members of the [westernised] elite.'<sup>62</sup> Dostoevsky believed that the intelligentsia would be 'fortified' by contact with the people (*narod*). Whilst Rasputin provides a number of examples of Soviet Russian youths who, despite growing up in the village, are enticed by rational and material Soviet culture and show no interest in tradition, he suggests that young Ivan in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* will achieve moral salvation thanks to his interest in Old Church Slavonic linguistics and religion. This idea recalls Dostoevsky who, in his major novels, 'attempted to show that the moral and spiritual decline of Russia's westernised classes could be arrested only by a return to native tradition and Orthodoxy.'<sup>63</sup> The four key tenets of *pochvennichestvo* were 'philosophical nominalism, relativism, immanentism, and organicism.'<sup>64</sup> Like Rasputin, the *pochvenniki* were anti-rationalists who 'insisted on the primacy of life and experience over theory and abstraction and rejected the imposition of rationally deduced, a priori ideas on life.'<sup>65</sup> Russian nationality is, in the organicist view of the men of the soil, a dynamic entity developing gradually and naturally towards the Russian ideal.<sup>66</sup> Unlike Rasputin and the Slavophiles then, the *pochvenniki* 'pinned their hopes on the future.'<sup>67</sup> Moreover, this organicism posits Russian nationality as the 'organic product of the collective strivings of the whole Russian people' and the 'entire Russian historical experience.'<sup>68</sup> For Rasputin, however, tradition and nationality are threatened by the changes wrought by the Soviet regime and its proponents, and those experienced in the post-Soviet period.

Another conservative movement which should be mentioned is Eurasianism which emerged in the 1920s. The Eurasians reimagined the role of the period of the Tatar yoke in Russia's history and argued that Russia represents a culturally and historically distinct Eurasian

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>62</sup> Derek Offord, 'The People', *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. By William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp.241-262 (p.250)

<sup>63</sup> Leatherbarrow, p.113

<sup>64</sup> Dowler, p.76

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.76

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.181

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.181

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp.55-6

continent.<sup>69</sup>In terms of their political project, Eurasians advanced the idea of a future, anti-Western ideocracy.<sup>70</sup> Mazurek and Torr believe it is unclear whether this ideocracy might also be a theocracy as the Eurasians 'write incessantly about the necessity for religious rebirth, the need to create an Orthodox culture, and the subordination of all areas of life to religion.' Eurasianism was resurrected by Aleksandr Dugin in the early 2000s. Described as Putin's Rasputin (in this case Grigorii, rather than Valentin), Dugin reimagines the old dichotomy between Russia and the West as an opposition of land and maritime civilisations: 'there is a struggle between, on the one hand, harmonious, land-based societies organized around history and tradition and, on the other, inherently liberal, "Atlanticist" "empires of the sea," whose capitalistic drive abhors and undermines tradition.'<sup>71</sup> The Atlanticists are, according to Dugin, led by the United States and are in opposition to his hoped for Eurasian socio-political network. Dugin presents a Fourth Political Theory after Marxism, fascism and liberalism which is based on Heidegger's idea of humanity, which is ultimately based on tradition. As such, 'the conflict between Atlanticism and Eurasianism can be understood as the conflict between individualistic societies and societies of tradition.'<sup>72</sup>Whilst Valentin Rasputin and Dugin clearly share anti-liberal sentiments, Rasputin does not express the same geopolitical and imperial concerns in his fiction in any major way, rather he privileges the notion of the 'village' over larger entities, whether city or empire. Rasputin, particularly in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* decries the spread of materialist culture to Russia, which he sees as coming from the West, whereas Dugin's anti-Americanism focuses on 'the spread of American imperial presence.'<sup>73</sup> Whilst Dugin claims to be concerned by the use of modern communication technology, he 'utilises it adroitly for his own objectives,'<sup>74</sup> and his ideology is essentially aimed at modernisation.<sup>75</sup> Rasputin was, conversely, sceptical of technology and modernisation, as shall be seen in the chapter on time and progress. It should also be

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<sup>69</sup> Sławomir Mazurek and Guy R. Torr, 'Russian Eurasianism: Historiosophy and Ideology', *Studies in East European Thought*, 54.1 (2002) 105–123 (pp.111-2)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp.115-6

<sup>71</sup> Audrey Tolstoy and Edmund McCaffrey, 'Mind Games: Alexander Dugin and Russia's War of Ideas', *World Affairs*, 177.6 (2015) 25-30 (p.26)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.27

<sup>73</sup> Dmitry Shlapentokh, 'Dugin Eurasianism: A Window on the Minds of the Russian Elite or an Intellectual Ploy?', *Studies in East European Thought*, 59.3 (2007) 215-236 (p.221)

<sup>74</sup> Tolstoy and McCaffrey, p.28

<sup>75</sup> Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, 'Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? 'Neo-Eurasianism' and Perennial Philosophy', *The Russian Review*, 68.4 (2009) 662–678 (p.677)



noted that Tolstoy and McCaffrey state that the ideology of Dugin resonates with 'high intellectuals and the conspiratorial fringe,' whereas the fictional work of Valentin Rasputin holds a more universal appeal.

Whilst similarities can be drawn between Rasputin's conservative worldview, as portrayed through his fictional writing, and other prominent conservative Russian ideas, Rasputin's perspective clearly does not adhere fully to any one mode of thought. Many of these conservative thinkers turn to historiosophy to try to explain Russia's distinctness and they present models of the ideal Russian nation. Rasputin's work is not, however, an ideology, though his experience of the world is shaped by his conservative outlook. This thesis will draw heavily on the work of British political philosopher, Roger Scruton (particularly his *A Political Philosophy*), in trying to define Rasputin's conservative outlook and its philosophical justifications. This thesis will explore Rasputin's conservative thought culturally, and Scruton's conservatism is rooted in 'a developed theory of culture.'<sup>76</sup> Whilst Rasputin and Scruton are writing within different political contexts, they write with similar motivations; just as Rasputin's writing reacts to the changes that he observes in the world around him, so Scruton's conservatism is rooted in 'in his concern for what modernity is doing to the world.'<sup>77</sup> Rasputin articulates a brand of conservatism that is not necessarily what might be expected: he presents more of an everyday conservatism that reflects an attitude to the lived experience rather than a political ideology. In a similar way, Scruton attempts to define what he believes to be the true meaning of conservatism against the way that it is apparently defined by the Conservative Party in the British context, and his ideas resonate strongly with those expressed by Rasputin.

This thesis will explore Rasputin's conservative outlook. Each chapter involves close reading of Rasputin's short novels, with even reference to each of the six works across the thesis as a whole so as to treat the development in Rasputin's conservative thought rather than

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Smith, 'Roger Scruton and the Conservation of Culture', *Society*, 45.6 (2008) 557–561 <<https://link-springer-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/article/10.1007/s12115-008-9140-2#citeas>> [accessed 15 August 2018]

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Dobson, 'Being human and living sustainably: a journey through time and an account of place', *Environmental Politics*, 14.3 (2005) 409–412 <<https://www-tandfonline-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/09644010500095429?scroll=top&needAccess=true>> [accessed 15 August 2018]

treating it as static. A chronological reading of the short novels transports the reader physically, metaphorically and temporally further from the traditional rural village as Rasputin plays witness to the transformation of Siberia from a rural to an urban society. Chapter one, on the theme of community, deals with the physical; chapter two, on the theme of nature, on the metaphorical; and chapter three, on the themes of time and progress, with the temporal. *Den'gi dlia Marii*, first published in 1967, portrays the emerging breakdown of the village community associated with the materialism and burgeoning shift towards urbanism that Rasputin observes in Soviet Siberia. *Poslednii srok*, published in 1970, further explores the breakdown of the rural community through an observation of the effects of the urbanisation process on one family. *Zhivi i pomni* is somewhat unusual compared to Rasputin's other novellas in that it is not around the time of its publication in 1974, but rather looks back to the challenging second world war era. In this novella, Rasputin presents a woman in moral crisis, torn between her loyalty to her community and her loyalty to her deserter husband, who becomes increasingly detached from society. *Proshchanie s Materoi*, set in 1976, is the last of Rasputin's novellas set in the traditional Siberian village. The village is threatened by the construction of a hydroelectric dam upstream and there is a clear divide in the outlook of the old, who have lived in the village their entire lives, and the young, who are moving away to the cities. *Pozhar*, published in 1985, is set in a settlement town, in which life is very different to that of the traditional village. The town experiences a fire which illuminates the lack of community spirit felt by its residents, whilst the description of the new type of work carried out by residents reveals a lack of concern for the natural world. *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, published in 2004, is set in post-communist Irkutsk which represents an almost complete break with the traditional village. The city and its residents are portrayed as almost entirely devoid of civic and moral conscience. As each novella progresses further from the traditional rural village beloved of Rasputin, the crises faced by his characters become all the more hellish: from financial concerns, family breakdown, moral dilemma resulting in suicide, desecration of graves and destruction of home, fire, to, finally, rape and murder. This development is a reflection of the progressive degeneration of Russian society to which Rasputin believes he bears witness.



## COMMUNITY

This chapter explores the disjunctures that Rasputin uses to define where true community is located, and where it is not. The traditional rural village of Rasputin's short novels appears as a conservative community based on territorial loyalty and the fate of this community is tied to the fate of Russia. The villagers live and work together, celebrate and mourn together, and their shared experience of life bonds them closely. The villagers' true affection for and respect towards each other and their village home results also in a shared sense of morality, which ensures order in the village. In the first five short novels this community is threatened by the arrival of outsiders and by the rationalistic and individualistic programme of Soviet communism which has led to increased urbanisation. This community becomes further fragmented in the 'legal vacuum of post-communist Russia'<sup>78</sup> depicted in the city in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*. For Rasputin, the peasantry of the countryside appear as the guardians of traditional Russian life against the universal and idealistic values that underpinned the Russian Revolution. In Rasputin's representation of the Russia of today little remains of the former harmony of village life though there is some hope that the morality of society might be restored through renewed connection with Russian heritage.

### Communal Village Life

Everyday life in the traditional village is experienced communally. At various points in the short novel *Proshchanie s Materoi* the villagers gather to drink tea. This 'samovar life', as Peterson has termed it, is the 'perfect epitome of the inefficient, labour intensive and

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<sup>78</sup> Roger Scruton, *A Political Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2006) p.12

therefore unhurried and meditative flow of the ancient communal life.<sup>79</sup> The villagers 'are accustomed to hard seasonal labor, but it is "peaceable work," it allows time and space for undirected gossip and reminiscence and it promotes the slow accretion of a shared, contextual identity.' This communal tea-drinking is so routine that Daria refills her guests' glasses for a fourth time without asking and with no expectation that they might need to hurry away:

Without asking Nastasya, Daria took her glass, splashed in some tea from the teapot and put it under the samovar ... Then Daria filled Sima's glass and added to her own - taking a breath, getting ready, wiping away the sweat, they began another round, bowing, groaning now and then, blowing on their saucers, gently slurping with lips outstretched. "Well, this is the fourth glass," Nastasya estimated.<sup>80</sup>

The multiple pauses in the narrator's description reflect the slow pace of life enjoyed by the villagers. In Khomiakov's Slavophile conception, the organic unity and freedom of the community involves 'the sharing, of not only sorrow, but also the joy of living.'<sup>81</sup> In Rasputin's short novels, the mundanity of everyday life is shared too.

Community ties appear to be built upon the genuine affection that the villagers have for each other. Nowhere is the joy of communal life more idealised than in chapter eleven when the villagers come together to mow the hay before they must say farewell to Matera:

And they worked with joy, with passion, the likes of which they had not experienced for a long time ... They made noise, played and fooled like children: drying off from their sweat, they rushed into the Angara with a scream ... There is no shame among your own - the women, following Klavka Strigunova's easy example, undressed to bare breasts and appeared daringly before the men, of whom there were less, and even chased after them to push them into the water.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Dale E. Peterson, "'Samovar Life': Russian Nurture and Russian Nature in the Rural Prose of Valentin Rasputin", *The Russian Review*, 53.1 (1994) 81-96 (p.90)

<sup>80</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi' in his *Zhivi i pomni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, 2016) pp.475-642 (p.483)

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Rabow-Edling, p.126

<sup>82</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', pp.544-5

The Edenic innocence of the women's semi-nakedness here is in stark contrast to the magazines and books on sale in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* whose covers showed 'pretty girls with their legs raised' and which formed part of the 'avalanche of filth' that emerged in culture after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>83</sup> After the completion of the hay mowing in *Proshchanie s Materoi*, '[the villagers] returned in the evening singing... Hearing the singing, everyone who had stayed in the village came outside [...] - children, old women, and also outsiders'<sup>84</sup> That evening, despite their exhaustion, the villagers 'gathered in the meadow [...] : it was important to be together.'<sup>85</sup> It is clear that the members of the community enjoy living and working together, and the true affection that they feel for each other is demonstrated clearly when the group saying goodbye to Egor and Nastasia '[sob] without restraint.'<sup>86</sup>

Just as the everyday is lived communally, so celebration is a shared experience. In *Zhivi i pomni*, the villagers gather at the Vologzhins' house to celebrate Maxim's return from the war and they are all equally moved by the events. Liza, Vasilisa and Maxim sing whilst Nadia and Vera cry.<sup>87</sup> Later, the initial reaction to the end of the war is described using collective nouns emphasising the unity of the community in a joyful moment: 'the village came alive'; 'the women [...] shouted and cried' and 'the children ran around.'<sup>88</sup> The entire village chooses to celebrate together, gathering to drink and feast with everybody contributing something to the communal meal.<sup>89</sup> They share smiles, hugs and laughter in celebration of what is a communal victory ('we've won!').<sup>90</sup> Likewise, the loss of individual men to the war effort is experienced as a collective loss: 'we've had many losses.'

In addition to shared everyday life and communal celebrations, villagers in the traditional community lend each other support in difficult times. Daria acts as a support to Katerina by standing next to her as they watch her house burn down and the other villagers felt

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<sup>83</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.729

<sup>84</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.545

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.546

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.524

<sup>87</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni' in his *Zhivi i pomni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, 2016) pp.293-474 (p.351)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.424

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.429

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.431

reassured knowing that Daria was there.<sup>91</sup> Katerina moves in with Daria after the fire and the women provide each other with mutual support which in fact enhances their experience of everyday life: 'it truly was easier for them together, both in terms of housework and conversation.'<sup>92</sup> At the end of the short novel, Daria, Bogodul, Katerina, Nastasia, Sima and the child Kolka, can be found sitting in Bogodul's hut waiting for the flood waters to come. The group find comfort in one another's presence and they appear physically as a unified group with the women rocking back and forth in time to Bogodul's snoring.<sup>93</sup> This echoes the narrator's earlier observation that the women would 'gladly agree' to dying next to each other at the same time.<sup>94</sup> Just as they are unified in refusing to leave their native land, so the villagers are unified in defending the land from the officials from the sanitary unit who come to clear the cemetery: Daria, Katerina, Tatiana, Liza, Vera, Grandpa Egor, Tunguska, Bogodul, and some others all go to confront the officials.<sup>95</sup> Not only are all of the villagers present as demonstrated in the previous list but they act collectively in opposition to the officials: the women shout and 'formed a circle around Vorontsov, Zhuk, and the men.'<sup>96</sup>

There is a sense of shared responsibility towards both the local environment and one's fellow villagers. When Daria is left alone to manage her household, she was told, 'of course' to ask her neighbour Vera for help if she needed any or fell sick.<sup>97</sup> Later the villagers help the same Vera to bale her hay. Vera gives her helpers food but 'it was clear that they worked not for the food but for her.'<sup>98</sup> It appears that help is given without question and without expectation of reward. Rasputin's communal vision has much in common with the Slavophiles' communal principle of *sobornost'*, which, though primarily an Orthodox principle (and idealised myth), was institutionalised in the *obshchina* (village commune).<sup>99</sup> The term *sobornost'* (which Walicki translates as the 'principle of conciliarism')<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.528

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.543

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.642

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.526

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.487

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.490

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.479

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.580

<sup>99</sup> Rabow-Edling, p.11

<sup>100</sup> Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p.158

pronounces the importance of participation in a voluntary and organic community which expresses 'unity in multiplicity'<sup>101</sup> or the 'unity in freedom' represented by the Orthodox Church.<sup>102</sup> Just as Rasputin's villagers are organically bonded through kinship and their shared experience of daily life, Sarah Young explains that Slavophile *sobornost'* arises from members of a shared space naturally and gradually uniting: 'this is not a unity that is imposed from above or that depends on material benefits such as security or profit; rather, it arises organically out of bonds of kinship, custom and mutual trust, each individual, guided by inner freedom.'<sup>103</sup> Whilst life in the Siberian village of Rasputin's short novels is dominated more by a mix of folk belief than Orthodoxy (as shall be seen in the next chapter) as in the Slavophile vision, the community does live together freely and harmoniously.

## Morality and Law

The altruistic nature of the village community is, however, at risk. According to Gillespie, in *Den'gi dlia Marii*, 'the strength and integrity of collectivist values on a communal and national scale are tested through the fate of an individual.'<sup>104</sup> The protagonist Kuz'ma must find a way to borrow one thousand roubles to save his wife, the eponymous Mariia, from imprisonment after a financial deficit is discovered in the village shop she that she manages. Earlier in 1947, to prevent their chairman from being imprisoned for obtaining fuel illegally, the villagers did 'everything in their power,' for example by going to the regional and district centres, as well as writing to Moscow.<sup>105</sup> In the collective conscience, his actions were not seen as reprehensible since they enabled the villagers to collect in the harvest, a task that appeared all the more pressing given the suffering they had experienced during the war and in the two years of famine that came afterwards. That their efforts were in vain was, according to Polowy, the mark of a 'legal system which appears absurd in its inflexibility and

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.192

<sup>102</sup> Rabow-Edling, p.126

<sup>103</sup> Sarah J. Young, 'Russian thought lecture 2: the Slavophiles and Russian communality' <<http://sarahjyoung.com/site/2012/10/24/russian-thought-lecture-2-the-slavophiles-and-russian-communality/>> [accessed 25 February 2018]

<sup>104</sup> Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*, p.20

<sup>105</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Den'gi dlia Marii' in his *Zhivi i pomni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, 2016) pp.5-92 (p.71)



inability to cope with human error or with spontaneous decisions.’<sup>106</sup> The action that might be taken against Mariia also seems unreasonable. It is clear that Mariia has not stolen from the shop and the accountant seems to acknowledge this fact by ‘taking a risk’ and allowing the couple five days to try to find the money, despite being unauthorised to do so.<sup>107</sup> Mariia is uneducated and one would agree with Kuz’ma’s conclusion that Mariia got into trouble because of her ignorance.<sup>108</sup> The amount of money that Kuz’ma must find is overwhelmingly large at a thousand roubles: he borrowed seven hundred roubles from the kolkhoz three years ago to build his house, his salary in money amounted to ‘almost nothing’<sup>109</sup> since then and there was ‘very little’ money in the village.<sup>110</sup> In the Soviet society that is not supposed to be concerned with the material, money has ironically become very important and appears as an alien imposition which alters the old moral workings of the village (this idea will be explored again in chapter 3). This change is explained by Old Gordei:

When did you ever hear of villagers helping each other for money? Need help building a house, a stove - that’s what it was called: help. If the owner had home-distilled vodka (*samogon*) he’d set it down, if not - well, it wasn’t necessary, another time they would come to help you. Now everything is for money.<sup>111</sup>

In contrast to the scene in *Proshchanie s Materoi* when the villagers help Vera to bale her hay simply out of kindness, the spirit of brotherly generosity that once existed in the village has been corrupted by the presence of money. This sentiment echoes the sense of the nineteenth century Romantics that ‘the reason for the loss of community in modern life...was the growing materialism and egoism of civil society.’<sup>112</sup> Consequently, whilst earlier the kolkhoz ‘stood firm in its defence of an individual [the chairman] in distress,’<sup>113</sup> it is uncertain, and perhaps unlikely, that Kuz’ma will manage to secure the money that he needs to save Mariia in the present day. Similarly in *Pozhar*, the villagers priorities are distorted by an awareness of money: the villagers rescue the valuables (Jawa motorbikes and a Ural

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<sup>106</sup> Polowy, p.36

<sup>107</sup> Valentin Rasputin, ‘Den’gi dlia Marii’, p.11

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p.18

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.47

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.43

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.42

<sup>112</sup> Rabow-Edling, p.111

<sup>113</sup> Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*, p.22

motorbike, scythes, sauce pans, crockery and sheet metal) and vodka, over the essentials (vegetable oil and flour).<sup>114</sup>

There are some kind-hearted villagers (Old Gordei, Vasily, Natalia and the chairman of the Kolkhoz) whose willing help 'suggests that spiritual and moral bonds between people are still intact in the Russian village.'<sup>115</sup> It is damning, however, that some villagers show no willingness to help Mariia even when they have the means, especially since Mariia's future is in jeopardy precisely because she acted on the responsibility that she felt towards her community. Mariia did not want to accept the job in the shop because of the troubles experienced by her predecessors but 'realised that somebody had to do the job' and felt it would be 'wrong' to keep on refusing, even though 'she was terrified' at the thought of accepting.<sup>116</sup> Polowy believes that in *Den'gi dlia Marii* Rasputin presents:

two different norms of daily reality - one which is grounded in a family and community ethic and in an altruistic attitude which pledges aid to one's family, friends, and fellow villagers, and the other which is based on a routine of self-centred interests. [...] The underlying issue is the changing ethical condition of the village where a sense of brotherhood and community is being lost, where old traditions are disappearing.<sup>117</sup>

There is a tension between individual and collective needs (as seen in Mariia's agreeing to work in the shop despite her fears) and the characters that Rasputin presents as morally superior are those who willingly subordinate themselves to the group. This is especially obvious in the juxtaposition between the generous Piotr Larionov (who would 'give you the whole world')<sup>118</sup> and his self-interested next door neighbour, Evgeny Nikolaevich, for whom money seems to have become an essential life force: giving away money was, for him, like giving away blood.

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<sup>114</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Pozhar' in his *Zhivi i pomni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, 2016) pp.643-697 (pp.652, 659, 667)

<sup>115</sup> Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*, p.21

<sup>116</sup> Rasputin, 'Den'gi dlia Marii', p.31

<sup>117</sup> Polowy, p.30

<sup>118</sup> Rasputin, 'Den'gi dlia Marii', pp.42-3

The same tension between collective and individual will is key to the moral dilemma at the heart of *Zhivi i pomni*. Nastena is torn between her loyalty to her husband (a loyalty which is itself inscribed in communal law),<sup>119</sup> who asks that she keeps secret the fact of his desertion, and her loyalty to the community, which asks that she reveal and denounce the truth of his solitary act. As Link explains, Nastena's sense of loyalty and duty 'prove to be, paradoxically, shaped and sanctioned by the very society she must betray in remaining true to those ideals.'<sup>120</sup> The villagers sympathise with the impossible multiplicity of Nastena's conflicting responsibilities to her husband, her community and her unborn child as shown by the fact that they bury her in the village cemetery despite the fact that 'suicide is traditionally regarded as unclean, and religious belief demands that suicides be buried apart.'<sup>121</sup> It is Nastena's sense of duty to the village and the 'accumulated burden of guilt and shame that she feels for herself and Andrei' in transgressing that duty, as well as the 'desperate concern about the social stigma which will be inherited by her unborn child' that lead her to suicide.<sup>122</sup> Her self-transcending act of suicide cleanses her moral record.<sup>123</sup> Nastena's altruism is in direct contrast to Andrei's egotistic desire to survive. It is at first possible to sympathise with Andrei's desertion given the multiple injuries he has sustained at the front, the ultimately false promise of a visit home and his conviction that he will certainly die without seeing Nastena again if he returns to the war front.<sup>124</sup> Andrei becomes increasingly unsympathetic, however, as he descends further into egocentricity. Andrei's absolute lack of regard for others is best demonstrated in his treatment of Nastena. Whilst she is selflessly devoted to Andrei, Polowy notes that Andrei only thinks of Nastena 'in terms of the salvation she offers him.'<sup>125</sup> Nastena becomes for Andrei his own 'Mother of God' ('*bogoroditsa moia*').<sup>126</sup> Andrei's reaction to the news that he will be a father is entirely self-

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<sup>119</sup> Laura J. Olson and Svetlana Adonyeva, *The Worlds of Russian Village Women* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) p.104

<sup>120</sup> Link, p.97

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.104

<sup>122</sup> Polowy, p.42

<sup>123</sup> Scruton, p.75

<sup>124</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', pp.308-311

<sup>125</sup> Polowy, p.43

<sup>126</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', p.362

centred ('my blood will live on') and he shows no concern for the social consequences that Nastena will face as a result of her pregnancy.<sup>127</sup>

The idea of 'community law' was an important aspect of nineteenth century Slavophilism and was discussed too by Romantics such as Herder. Rabow-Edling explains that:

In an organic community, social conflict could not be inherent or natural. [...] To Herder, as to the Slavophiles, true law was customary law. It was inherent in the traditional mode of life of a natural community. This law did not need external authority or power, because it was an expression of a people's moral consciousness. A society could not be held together only by abstract laws. The purely legal framework of the liberal state was not enough to guarantee a genuine community. A common public spirit was also needed. There had to be genuine affection and love between fellow citizens.<sup>128</sup>

The 'moral consciousness' of the community is juxtaposed against rational legalism in both *Den'gi dlia Marii* and *Zhivi i pomni*. Legally speaking, both Mariia and Nastena have transgressed the rules of society and yet both find sympathy within the community: community-minded villagers give Mariia financial support and the women of Atamanovka bury Nastasia amongst their own following her suicide. This reflects the reality of the village where 'morality comes not from institutions but from human beings and their sense of relatedness.'<sup>129</sup> The presence of official legal society is most dominant in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, the short novel in which lawlessness is also most prevalent. In *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, Rasputin presents Irkutsk society as fragmented and individualistic; entirely devoid of community cohesion. Not only is the traditional sense of right and wrong overturned, but so too the way that people live. Anatoly muses over the following:

he could not but notice in what a rush people protected themselves with iron bars on their windows and armored doors, while the rich also stretch barbed wire over concrete fences twice human height, and raised guard towers at the corners with armed guards. [...] In fact - how terribly much of life was behind bars!<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.364

<sup>128</sup> Rabow-Edling, p.111

<sup>129</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.302

<sup>130</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.783

Poor people also live behind 'ironclad' doors with 'double or triple locks.'<sup>131</sup> The part of physical and psychological barrier that was played by the river in isolating Andrei from the village in *Zhivi i pomni*, is here a stronger, material barrier. The situation goes beyond community breakdown to an environment where people actively 'protect themselves' from contact with others. Outside of these enclosed spaces, people avoid others in an almost robot-like manner with people in a crowd walking around each other using some 'navigational instinct.'<sup>132</sup> Any friendship that is experienced amongst the city's youth lacks the emotional depth and warmth displayed amongst the villagers in *Proshchanie s Materoi*. Tamara Ivanovna's sense of her daughters group of friends is that they were held together by a weak force, 'like temporary fellow travellers.'<sup>133</sup>

A distinction is drawn between the security of the home and 'the riotous life' outside.<sup>134</sup> The streets are overrun with criminals, and even those who are not criminals lack any sense of responsibility or care for each other. It is unsurprising that Svetka believes nobody will help her to escape her future rapist. Tamara Ivanovna explains that:

"People kill in broad daylight — but there's no crime, no justice, nothing! People rob around the clock - nothing! They steal, rape, dispose of people like livestock ... worse than livestock! Nothing is done anywhere! What do you think," she panted, "that if she, our daughter, rushed to seek protection at the tram stop, would they help her? Are you sure? I'm not sure! And my daughter was not sure! Don't we know that when a person is killed in the middle of a crowd, and the crowd scatters! Don't we know that people shy away from the cry of 'help!' and cover their ears! Justice!"<sup>135</sup>

Even 'friends' cannot be relied upon. Svetka asks her friend Lida not to leave her, thinking that if they go together with the man from the market 'it would not be dangerous.'<sup>136</sup> Lida, however, runs away from them, thus abandoning her friend.<sup>137</sup> The society presented in the

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<sup>131</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.702

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.202

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.141

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p.192

<sup>135</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.758

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p.750

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.705

short novel corresponds to the society based on rationalistic and contractual thinking described by Khomiakov:

Khomiakov argued that a society, based on formal legality, was held together solely by conditional agreements or contracts. These were only artificial bonds, without support from either mores or morals. Such a society lacked faith in people's moral feeling and in human value. A society founded on true legality, on the other hand, was held together by bonds of brotherhood. In such a society, there was a fundamental understanding of justice.<sup>138</sup>

Indeed, for Svetka and her family, there is no justice to be found through the official justice system, the proponents of which lack compassion and faith in human value, as in Khomiakov's conception of the rationalistic and self-interested state. The lieutenant that Tamara Ivanovna and Anatoly first meet to report their missing daughter is entirely uninterested in the case simply pushing a piece of paper towards them, telling them to 'write a statement' and sighing at the fact that the beer he was drinking was almost gone.<sup>139</sup> A rational approach is taken towards punishment and justice: the district attorney asserts that justice should be guided by actions and not feelings,<sup>140</sup> and that the district attorney's office exists to 'measure' crime in order to 'determine the length of the punishment.'<sup>141</sup> Whilst this logical approach to jurisdiction might be argued to ensure fairness and avoid errors, the system is, in its alienation from a 'natural' humanity, corruptible. If at first it is hinted that friends of Svetka's rapist are bribing Investigator Tsokol then this is made explicit: '[he] tried to hide the packet of money in his hands.'<sup>142</sup> Mistakes are also made in the analysis of evidence: the preliminary results of the medical tests performed on Svetka after her rape later shown to be incorrect according to the final results.<sup>143</sup> The opacity and sterility of the legal process is portrayed through the district attorney's defence of the investigatory method stating that they get dozens of similar cases and 'we learned how to

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<sup>138</sup> Rabow-Edling, p.119

<sup>139</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.725

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.758

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.777

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp.757, 775

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.755

try them,’<sup>144</sup> and later in the depiction of Tamara Ivanovna’s trial lawyer who used ‘such fancy words that no ordinary mortal could comprehend them.’<sup>145</sup> It is unsurprising that Tamara Ivanovna takes justice into her own hands and shoots her daughter’s rapist dead as he sits in the district attorney’s office just moments before, as the reader later learns, he was to be released.<sup>146</sup> In this way, Tamara Ivanovna obtains on her own terms the justice which the legal system fails to deliver. The measures that Tamara Ivanovna takes are understandable, justifiable and forgivable in the world of Rasputin’s novella, which is dominated by a ‘natural’ humanity. Unlike Svetka’s rapist who denied committing rape,<sup>147</sup> Tamara Ivanovna does at least admit her guilt and take ‘full responsibility.’<sup>148</sup> She accepts her six year prison sentence willingly and, whilst she admits that she is not sorry for her actions, she expresses some sense of having a guilty conscience. Even within the otherwise seemingly hardened prosecutor’s office, the personnel sympathise with Tamara Ivanovna:

On the inside they felt sorry for Tamara Ivanovna, officially they condemned her for excessive... for excessive what? Maternal and human feelings, for an excessive sense of justice? But how else can you stand up against the frenzy of anarchical violence and cruelty if the state does not fulfill its duties, and the justice system starts trading laws like radishes from the garden? How? They felt sorry for Tamara Ivanovna and secretly acquitted her.<sup>149</sup>

Community law which arises naturally and spontaneously within the village community as a result of the respect and responsibility that its members feel for one another is seen to be morally superior to and more just than the corruptible and ironically seemingly illogical official system of law, which is based on reason and science.

## Outsiders

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p.757

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.835

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.784

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.755

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.836

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.817

Within the conservative idea of community, there is a natural limit to who can be considered part of this shared territory and who is, instead, an outsider. The depiction of outsiders becomes progressively more hostile throughout Rasputin's short novels, to the point of being openly xenophobic in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*. Whilst in *Den'gi dlia Marii*, Kuz'ma's interaction with three city-dwellers on the train is a symbolic scene in which 'town and village are unable to understand and accommodate each other,'<sup>150</sup> in later short novels, 'the depiction of the faceless system as the villain alters and specific individuals acquire the function of antagonist.'<sup>151</sup> A number of outsiders visit the village in *Proshchanie s Materoi*. The officials, who represent 'the rational mind',<sup>152</sup> who come to clear the cemetery are described as 'strangers' by Bogodul and as 'tourists' by Grandpa Egor.<sup>153</sup> Vorontsov is repeatedly referred to as a 'gypsy.'<sup>154</sup> The officials' use of emotionless officialese in referring to the villagers as the 'citizens-to-be-flooded' ('*grazhdane zatopliaemye*'), to the river as the 'reservoir basin' ('*lozhe vodokhranilishcha*') and the island as the 'flood zone' ('*zona zatoplenie*')<sup>155</sup> emphasises their distance from the land and its people, whose speech is rich with Siberian dialecticisms, proverbs and idiomatic phrases, and the syntax and rhythms of oral folklore.<sup>156</sup> Just as the officials reveal themselves unaware of the villagers' values in their lack of respect for the villagers' dead, the officials are equally unaware of the routines of rural life. Vorontsov's alienation from this world is powerfully revealed when he asks the villagers to complete the mowing during a downpour of rain which prompts the villages to believe that he had come from the moon.<sup>157</sup> Other outsiders are brought into the village to assist with the harvest. They are variously described as a 'horde' [*orda*],<sup>158</sup> 'non-locals' [*ne svoi*],<sup>159</sup> and 'strangers' [*chuzhoi*],<sup>160</sup> and their behaviour frightens the villagers with its 'satanic' nature.<sup>161</sup> Whilst the outsiders of *Proshchanie s Materoi* are antagonistic figures

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<sup>150</sup> Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*, p.22

<sup>151</sup> Polowy, p.87

<sup>152</sup> Gillespie, *Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose*, p.42

<sup>153</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', pp.485, 490

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., pp.488, 490

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp.486, 488, 489

<sup>156</sup> Polowy, p.135

<sup>157</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.567

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.583

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.586

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., pp.586, 596

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.587



against whom the village must be defended, the language used in relation to outsiders in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* is altogether more condemnatory, and even xenophobic. Demin talks in racist terms of an 'invasion' of 'black, yellows, calicoes' who act like 'conquerors.'<sup>162</sup> The narrator stereotypes the Chinese market traders as 'smiling' and 'crafty' and the Caucasian traders as 'morose' and 'audacious', whilst the locals buying their goods are 'gullible.'<sup>163</sup> Given the apparent xenophobic attitude towards foreigners, it is unsurprising that Rasputin chooses as Svetka's rapist an Azeri, who is described as 'non-Russian'<sup>164</sup> and whom Svetka found 'repulsive' on first meeting.<sup>165</sup> Svetka is guilty of prejudice in stating herself afraid of people of Caucasian descent, who she refers to rather as 'them, those.'<sup>166</sup> This prejudice is presented as justified by the fact that Svetka is raped, an act described by Scruton as 'a desecration, a spoiling and polluting... [it is an] existential seizure that humiliates and destroys... It becomes a kind of sacrilege - a wiping away of freedom, personality and transcendence, to reveal the passionless contortions of what is merely flesh.'<sup>167</sup> Not only is personal suffering experienced, but the entire nation of Russian people seems to be under threat by the appearance of foreigners. The consequences of the presence of non-ethnic Russians in Russia is portrayed in overtly nationalistic tones. Svetka's rapist is contrasted with Ivan the son. Whilst Eldar speaks Russian poorly,<sup>168</sup> Ivan discovers an interest in Russian linguistics and reads a book of Russian folk sayings and a Church Slavonic dictionary:

In this was rooted the stability of the Russian person. Without this, he is able to get lost and lose himself. ... But when the Russian word sounds in you, bringing from afar, the far-reaching kinship of everyone who created and spoke it ... when there is in you this all-powerful native word next to your heart and soul, saturated with ancestral blood, then you cannot go wrong. The word is stronger than the hymn and the flag, the oath and the vow; since ancient times it has itself been an impassable

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<sup>162</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.792

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p.823

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. p.703

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p.749

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.750

<sup>167</sup> Scruton, pp.93-4

<sup>168</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.733

oath and vow. If the word is there, everything else is there too, but if it is not - there will be nothing to anchor the most sincere impulses.<sup>169</sup>

Through Ivan, the Russian language itself appears as a direct link to one's ancestors and Russian tradition, and their salvational and nation-forming qualities. The fact that Russianness is attributed through use of the Russian language which connects the Russian to his Russian ancestors, rather than through the use of hymns or flags, makes Russianness exclusive. Foreigners, who it appears do not speak Russian and whose ancestors are not Russian, must then inevitably be barred from Russian belonging.

## Conclusion

Clearly, the idea of community attached to a homeland is central to the world of the rural village depicted in Rasputin's short novels. The passage above 'emphasizes historical loyalties, local identities and the kind of long-term commitment that arises among people by virtue of their localized and limited affections,' just as in Scruton's conception of conservative nations.<sup>170</sup> Rasputin's conservative concerns are inherently local, in contrast to the globalism of socialism and liberalism. Rasputin's village society originates in and is supported by territorial loyalty: 'patriots are attached to the people and the territory that are *theirs by right*; and patriotism involves an attempt to transcribe that right into impartial government and a rule of law.'<sup>171</sup> The inseparable nature of the relationship between town and villagers is reminiscent of that portrayed in Solzhenitsyn's *Matrenin dvor*. The role played by Daria in *Proshchanie s Materoi* is also very similar to that played by the Solzhenitsyn's heroine, 'without whom, as the saying goes, the village cannot stand. Nor the town. Nor our whole land.'<sup>172</sup> The villagers' belonging to the community is similar to Scruton's description of nationality, which arises spontaneously as a result of social

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.833

<sup>170</sup> Scruton, p.ix

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>172</sup> Quoted in Porter, pp.43-4

interaction,<sup>173</sup> and is a form of social membership in which the members are neighbours who 'share a territory, share a history; they may also share a language and a religion.'<sup>174</sup> Scruton believes this type of society to be particularly cohesive, and he quotes J. S. Mill to explain this unity: the members of the community, in sharing a homeland and heritage, experience 'a feeling of common interest among those who live under the same government, and are contained within the same natural or historical boundaries. [...] They are one people' and 'their lot is cast together.'<sup>175</sup> Whilst the communities of the novels' Siberian countryside setting are not nations in themselves, they are certainly communities of neighbours which follow a set of communal laws. There is, however, a fluidity to national loyalty (Scruton argues that 'since national loyalties are defined by territory, they can be multiple, and can nest within each other without conflict' - he gives the British union of England and Scotland as an example)<sup>176</sup> that will accommodate the idea of loyalty both to rural Siberia and to the nation of Russia more broadly. Accordingly, that which occurs in the village has implications for the nation of Russia as a whole. This is justified by the naming of the village Matera - with its associations with the word for mother (*mat'*) which Polowy interprets as signifying Matera's status as a cultural symbol of Motherland - which might be taken as a microcosm Mother Russia.<sup>177</sup> The decline of the harmonious and morally upstanding village community therefore also represents the moral degeneration of Russia during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Whilst Rasputin's patriotic depiction of life in the countryside has an obvious appeal to those who recognise the same lack of social cohesion today, his patriotism - 'a natural love of country, countrymen and the culture that unites them'<sup>178</sup> which motivates citizens to 'protect that territory from erosion and waste'<sup>179</sup> - is transformed in his later short novels into a pathological form of national loyalty: nationalism. Whilst Scruton describes nationalism as a 'belligerent ideology', it is nevertheless a worldview that unites community insiders in a 'shared hostility to the

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p.4

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p.16

<sup>177</sup> Polowy, p.173

<sup>178</sup> Scruton, p.3

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p.42

stranger, the intruder, the person who belongs 'outside', who is scapegoated for the problems of the community.

## NATURE

This chapter investigates the theme of disconnection from nature—through urbanisation, sociopathic tendencies, or cataclysmic disruption—and how it dehumanizes individuals and the population. The peasant worldview inherited and conserved by Rasputin is itself conservative in outlook: those villagers who maintain traditional village values show love and respect for the environment of which they are the guardians. They experience a kinship with the natural world: humans, domesticated animals and the worked land live together as one harmonious community. The villagers' proximity to nature is reflected in their religious worldview, which appears as a mixture of Byzantine Christianity and Slavic paganism. Those characters who become disconnected from nature, however, enticed rather by Soviet construction projects, technology or the city, also find themselves disconnected from the rural villagers, and their sense of morality.

### Conservatives and Conservation

The natural world holds an important place in Rasputin's conservative vision. Outside of his fiction writing Rasputin campaigned passionately for ecological causes. Within his prose works, Rasputin appears as a literary conservationist, preserving both the village environment and the traditional rural way of life in his works and recording the process by which the village is transformed. In contrast to the Slavophiles who were noble intellectuals that idealised the peasant community from outside, Rasputin is able to capture the rural environment and way of life with intimate precision because he is a member of its community. He grew up in a Siberian village on the Angara river, Atalanka, that was flooded

as a result of the building of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Dam.<sup>180</sup> That Rasputin comes from the village not only explains his ability to realistically capture the rural village in his prose but also his affinity for it in a time of great change, as clarified by Scruton's description of the reasons that conservatives stand for certain values: 'they are for them, not because they have arguments in their favour, but because they know them, live with them, and find their identity threatened (often they know not how) by the attempt to interfere with their operation.'<sup>181</sup>

Rasputin's ecological concerns are unsurprising given the natural affinity that the conservative has for conservation. Whilst environmentalists are most often associated with a liberal philosophy, 'offering ecological rectitude as part of a comprehensive call for 'social justice', it is in fact no coincidence that the words conservative and conservation share the same semantic root.<sup>182</sup> Scruton defines conservatism as 'an exercise in social ecology' and argues that 'conservatism and conservation are in fact two aspects of a single long-term policy, which is that of husbanding resources.'<sup>183</sup> These resources include not just the environment but also the customs and institutions established by previous generations. In Scruton's view, the goal of politics should not be to revolutionise society in the pursuit of an ideal (such as communism, for example). The conservative purpose is instead 'to maintain a vigilant resistance to the entropic forces that erode our social and ecological inheritance' so that 'the order and equilibrium of which we are the temporary trustees' may be passed onto future generations. Conservation, both of the natural environment and the stable and ordered way of life, is, for the conservative, therefore a 'part of any durable social order.'<sup>184</sup> According to Scruton, who is inspired by Edmund Burke, conservation is inherently motivated by love: love of ancestors who made sacrifices for the living and love of the unborn for whose lives the living plan, who together inspire a relationship of trusteeship. Conservation is also inspired by national loyalty, 'love of country, love of territory and love of that territory as home,'<sup>185</sup> which incites people to 'protect territory recognised as 'ours' -

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<sup>180</sup> Polowy, pp.2, 5

<sup>181</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, 3rd edn (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001) p.2

<sup>182</sup> Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.33

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p.34

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.35

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.43

defined, in other words, through some inherited entitlement.’ The values of home land and community, with which man shares his heritage and inheritance, are central to the intrinsically conservative idea of conservation, which aims to ‘defend a shared but threatened legacy from predation by its current trustees’.<sup>186</sup> It is these values, present in the peasants’ traditional worldview as presented in Rasputin’s novellas, that ‘safeguard the long-term interests of society.’<sup>187</sup>

### **Kinship with the Natural World**

Valentin Rasputin displays a keen awareness of the natural world which reflects his native experience of life in the rural village which is so closely tied to the land. This connection is central to the novellas’ morality since it is the peasant’s relationship with the soil that is ‘his best trait.’<sup>188</sup> Rasputin describes the environment with reference to the five senses. The air of Matera is filled with the scent of herbs, the forest, leaves and needles, bushes, lumber: ‘it smelled of life.’<sup>189</sup> Just as the narrator is able to recognise the smells of different plants, through the Master, Rasputin displays a highly detailed awareness of the various sounds of nature:

The murmur of the water ... like the wind in the trees .... splashes of late playing fish. These were ... the sounds of the Angara, which having heard and recognised, you could then hear the sounds of the island: the heavy, straining creak of the old larch on the grass and the dull tramp of cows grazing ... and in the village the incessant stirring of everything that lives on the street - chickens, dogs, cattle ... in the ground and near the ground: the rustle of a mouse going out for a hunt, the muted bustle of a little bird sitting in a nest on its eggs, the weak, fading creak of a swaying branch that seemed uncomfortable to a night bird, the breath of growing grass.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p.39

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p.37

<sup>188</sup> Brown, p.220

<sup>189</sup> Rasputin, ‘Proshchanie s Materoi’, p.559

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., pp.511-2

Polowy discusses Rasputin's use of onomatopoeia, highlighting the phrases '*shurshanie vody*'<sup>191</sup> and '*shipenie [reki]*'<sup>192</sup> in which the 'sh' sound echoes the sound of the water.<sup>193</sup> In the quote above, the master listens to the creak ('*skrip*') of the larch. The use of onomatopoeia not only demonstrates Rasputin's proximity to the natural world but also acts to preserve this threatened environment within the writing itself.

The changes and destruction brought to the natural environment are stressed by the juxtaposition of the village and the city. The young Ivan notices the fruits and vegetables at the market, describing them as 'shimmering with all the colours of the rainbow.'<sup>194</sup> Lake Baikal provides a similarly colourful setting, with water that also 'shimmers' with green, dark blue and azure, and pure gold blossom falling on the shore.<sup>195</sup> In contrast, the city is covered in a 'grey haze' and has a 'colourless' appearance.<sup>196</sup> In the village, the stars burn with 'passion and promise,'<sup>197</sup> whilst, in contrast, no stars are to be seen in the city.<sup>198</sup> The light from the electricity is instead described as an 'iridescent, putrid glow' which spread 'like duckweed on a swamp.' That this light is 'putrid' (*gniloi*) identifies it as polluting whilst the simile comparing the electric light to duckweed (*riaska*) stresses its rapid and uncontrolled spread across the landscape. The destructive effect that other technologies are having on the environment is emphasised by the use of the narrator's metaphor describing streams of cars as 'lava.'<sup>199</sup> Whilst the scent of freshly mown hay brings 'pleasure' to the residents of Matera,<sup>200</sup> the overwhelming smells of the city are described in highly disagreeable terms: 'cloying smell of liquid paint;'<sup>201</sup> 'a closed kiosk that reeked of paint;'<sup>202</sup> 'stinking of gasoline, coal, and iron;'<sup>203</sup> 'fermented vapours of age-old garbage.'<sup>204</sup> Tamara Ivanovna remembers a

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p.640

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., pp.638, 639

<sup>193</sup> Polowy, pp.155-7

<sup>194</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.830

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.855

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.860

<sup>197</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Poslednii krok', in his *Zhivi i pomni* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo, 2016) pp.93-240 (p.223)

<sup>198</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.701

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p.860

<sup>200</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.546

<sup>201</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.747

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.769

<sup>203</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.629



childhood in the countryside with roosters ‘crowing’, cows ‘bellowing’ and swallows ‘warbling.’<sup>205</sup> Whilst these noises are loud, they came together in a ‘song of celebration’ of the natural world, whereas in the noisy new settlement of *Proshchanie s Materoi*, the street is, according to Pavel, ‘always noisy’ because of the ‘clatter of machinery’, whilst from another street comes the ‘whine of motorcycles.’<sup>206</sup>

Nature, in Rasputin’s short novels, is personified as a conscious and active participant in the lives of the villagers. The weather, for example, changes to reflect that which occurs in the villagers’ lives: as Anna’s condition improves in *Poslednii srok*, so the fog clears and the sun comes out. The narrator tells that, rather than being an accident, there was a ‘purpose’ to the weather being nice and that this ‘purpose’ may be connected to Anna.<sup>207</sup> Rasputin employs pathetic fallacy: a blizzard rages in *Zhivi i pomni* which both reflects the emotional torment in which Nastena finds herself and protects her from detection as she goes to visit Andrei. The narrator says there might have been a storm ‘to cover her tracks.’<sup>208</sup> The way that Rasputin attaches human emotions to natural phenomena stresses man’s inseparability from the world around him. Nature is personified and feels emotion. The narrator in *Pozhar* describes the earth’s human reaction to the blaze: the earth was ‘hiding quietly and sadly’ among the snow as if it was also ‘suffering.’<sup>209</sup> Similarly, the sky in *Doch’ Ivana, mat’ Ivana* reacts to being polluted, staying high as though ‘distancing itself from the big city’ which made it ‘black with soot all winter.’<sup>210</sup> Nature also communicates with man in a human way. Ivan Petrovich in *Pozhar*, imagines that the walls, earth, sky and river speak using ‘human words,’<sup>211</sup> and the inhabitants of Tamara Ivanovna’s childhood village said that the Angara’s stones tell stories.<sup>212</sup> As Polowy writes: ‘natural elements and natural phenomena are not

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<sup>204</sup> Rasputin, ‘Doch’ Ivana, mat’ Ivana’, p.771

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p.707

<sup>206</sup> Rasputin, ‘Proshchanie s Materoi’, p.629

<sup>207</sup> Rasputin, ‘Poslednii srok’, p.111

<sup>208</sup> Rasputin, ‘Zhivi i pomni’, p.356

<sup>209</sup> Valentin Rasputin, ‘Pozhar’ in his *Siberia on Fire*, trans. by Gerald Mikkelsen and Margaret Winchell (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989) pp.102-167 (p.159)

<sup>210</sup> Rasputin, ‘Doch’ Ivana, mat’ Ivana’, p.754

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.,p.648

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.,p.730

mere symbols but often objects of animistic and anthropomorphic transformations.’<sup>213</sup> She argues that the attribution of consciousness to the natural world in Rasputin’s work stems from the animism that is ‘deeply rooted in the pre-Christian beliefs of peoples to whom the natural environment is crucial for survival’ and which has been ‘preserved as an important component in the folk mentality.’<sup>214</sup>

Animals too are assigned human qualities and are valued members of the village community. Villagers feel affection for domestic animals. In *Poslednii srok*, Anna addresses her faltering horse, Igrenka, and reminds him of his former strength. She tells how she and the horse survived the winter and the war and how this job is ‘nothing compared to that.’<sup>215</sup> Anna refers to herself and her horse as a pair (*‘my s toboi’*) which introduces a sense of teamwork. Anna comforts Igrenka by rubbing his neck and he ‘replies’ to her encouragements with a neigh. Just as Anna mourns the loss of her cow to the Kolkhoz (*‘I cried and cried’*),<sup>216</sup> Mironikha worries about her missing cow, not because of what it can provide but from a true affection: ‘I just want to see my cow again, to know that she hasn’t been eaten by a bear.’<sup>217</sup> In fieldwork carried out between 1983 and 2010 investigating the lives of Russian rural women, Olson and Adonyeva noted the significance that rural women assigned to the keeping of cows, the act of which symbolises ‘her maternal quality, maturity, caretaking ability, ability to feed others, and independence’ and ‘was a script that fulfilled the cultural imperative that a woman is responsible for feeding her family.’<sup>218</sup> This symbolic importance of keeping a cow is clear in *Poslednii srok* too as seen in the following rhetorical question: ‘could you call yourself a woman if you didn’t have a cow?’<sup>219</sup>

It must be noted, however, that it is with domesticated animals that man experiences kinship. The state of being wild is frequently associated in Rasputin’s novellas with evil characters. It is clear that, whilst the natural world is perceived as part of the village home

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<sup>213</sup> Polowy, p.54

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p.167

<sup>215</sup> Rasputin, ‘*Poslednii srok*’, p.162

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p.181

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p.272

<sup>218</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.71

<sup>219</sup> Rasputin, ‘*Poslednii srok*’, p.176

and community and being in nature can bring intense happiness, the balance of human connection is vital to the preservation of morality. Writing in *Voprosy literatury* in 1976, Rasputin declared that 'alienation is the most dangerous thing that can happen in the character of a person.'<sup>220</sup> In *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, Svetka's rapist is described as a 'predator',<sup>221</sup> a 'wolf disguised as a human'<sup>222</sup> and as having 'a hook nose like a bird of prey.'<sup>223</sup> Ivan Savelievich in the same short novel remembers a newcomer to the village who he refers to as a 'battering ram' and a reptile.<sup>224</sup> The Soviet officials in *Proshchanie s Materoi* are described in similarly unflattering and non-human terms: one has the name 'Comrade Beetle,' whilst two unnamed officials are described as bearlike and an asp.<sup>225</sup> Daria denounces one of these same officials as inhuman saying: 'You're not human.'<sup>226</sup> The richest example of such a vilifiable character is Andrei in *Zhivi i pomni*, about whom 'Rasputin makes extensive use of beast imagery and demonic imagery to portray [his] spiritual degeneration.'<sup>227</sup> Hiding from people, he becomes more and more animalistic and devilish. He successfully learns to howl like a wolf,<sup>228</sup> and feels safest sleeping in a cave in a group of rocks which is described as his 'lair,'<sup>229</sup> which suggests obvious parallels with a bear. Andrei displays no sympathy or kindness towards a goat that he kills but instead seems fascinated by and prolongs its suffering:

When Guskov reached here, she was still alive. Wheezing and flailing her legs, she raked up the snow beneath her; her eyes were bloodshot, her head lifted and fell. He did not finish her off as he should have, but stood and watched, trying not to miss a single movement, how a dying animal suffers, how convulsions subside and reappear, how the head writhes in the snow.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Quoted in Polowy, p.29

<sup>221</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.816

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p.817

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p.774

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p.810

<sup>225</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', pp.485, 486

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.486

<sup>227</sup> Link, p.110

<sup>228</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', p.339

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p.336

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p.337

The sickening description of the goat's wheezing and flailing in struggle is highly emotive, which serves to emphasise Andrei's cold reaction. Andrei's dissociation from humanity is underlined further by the fact that he mistakes his own reflection in the goat's eyes for a devilish creature: 'he saw two hairy, horrible devils that looked like him.' Andrei's descent into wild animality reaches its pinnacle in the episode where he kills and skins a calf in front of its mother. The language used to describe Andrei's treatment of the calf underlines his display of dominance and strength: he 'grabbed,' 'hauled' and 'pulled' it.<sup>231</sup> In this moment, the cow appears more human than Andrei: she exhibits human emotions such as anger ('[she] let out a loud angry moo'),<sup>232</sup> and her pained reactions to Andrei's actions are personified: 'the cow cried out behind him.'<sup>233</sup> The episode serves to powerfully denounce Andrei and, in the senseless murder (Andrei is unsure if he killed for meat or pleasure)<sup>234</sup> of a baby cow in front of its mother, reinforces the destructive influence that Andrei has upon the pregnant Nastena. Indeed, Nastena herself is associated with a wild animal at points through her association with Andrei:

it was especially unpleasant to lie down on the cold, slippery high shelf, smelling like rotten leaves, which Nastena had to climb onto on all fours; it seemed to Nastena that she would immediately be covered in disgusting fur, and that if she wished she could howl in an animal like manner.<sup>235</sup>

The hut in Andreyevskoe is portrayed as uncomfortable and unclean; it is a shelter rather than a home, lacking as it is in family spirit.

The importance of the balance between man and the natural world is also exemplified in the representation of cultivated land and the elevating nature of hard work. Brown asserts that the peasant's closeness to the soil is 'his best trait.'<sup>236</sup> Brown believes that the village prose writers' interest in man's relationship to the soil is 'directly related to a nationalistic quest

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p.422

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p.421

<sup>233</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', p.423

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p.424

<sup>235</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', pp.359-60

<sup>236</sup> Brown, p.220

for the ultimate sources of the Russian spirit.<sup>237</sup> It is not untrue that this affection for the soil can be related to certain nationalistic ideals but Rasputin is not in search of the markers of Russian identity, instead he is demonstrating and preserving them. Throughout the short novels, Rasputin builds the impression that it is through hard work on the land that man recognises his true nature and purpose. In *Pozhar*, Ivan's experience of work is as follows: 'when he's working [...] he rises above [kilometres, cubic metres, and rubles]' (representing the rational world) into a spiritual world where 'there is no bookkeeping, only movement, rhythm, and celebration,' and he is in touch with his soul and its 'primordial inclination.'<sup>238</sup> The connection between the spiritual and the earthly truth of work is underlined by the equal mention of the soul and the primordial. For Mikhail in *Poslednii srok*, working is equated with praying for forgiveness: through work you can 'redeem yourself.'<sup>239</sup> In contrast, Daria's grandson, Andrei, who uses machines to work the land, has 'wasted [his] soul.'<sup>240</sup> Nowhere is the uplifting power of communal hard work on the land clearer than in *Proshchanie s Materoi* when the villagers return to mow the hay:

The truth is in caring for the haystacks. That's what they are for here ... that's the way it is, but it's not just that ... these songs after work, when it's as if it's not them, not people, but their souls singing, joined together ... that sweet and disturbing swooning in the evenings ... when it seems that you are quietly and smoothly gliding over the earth, barely moving your wings, steered along the blessed path revealed to you ... the silent, deep ache that arose from nowhere, when you realise you did not know yourself until the present moment, did not know that you are not only that which you carry inside yourself, but also that which is around you and is not always noticed ... - all this will be remembered for a long time and will remain in the soul as an unsetting light and joy. Perhaps it is only this that is eternal, only this which is transmitted, like the Holy Spirit, from person to person, from fathers to children and from children to grandchildren, confounding and protecting them, guiding and cleansing them, and bringing them someday to the reason for which generations of people lived.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p.221

<sup>238</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.688

<sup>239</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.145

<sup>240</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.570

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., pp.558-9

Through hard work on the soil, man both elevates and grounds himself, and it is man's physical connection to the soil that gives land value. The untended landscape is depicted unfavourably in *Poslednii srok* during Liusia's forest walk:

It all came together in a wide, alien image of desolation... The scent of grain, customary for this time, has long since gone; it smelled of a mish-mash of overripe forest plants and the sweet, dry breath emanating from the abandoned soil.<sup>242</sup>

That the earth, elsewhere life-giving, is here a desolate area and the soil is 'neglected' coupled with the use of the perfective verb '*istaiat*' emphasise the extent and finality of the desolation and the lack of human attention paid to formerly cultivated land. In a similar way, Afanasii and Pavel in *Proshchanie s Materoi* are worried about the condition of the land in the new settlement: they believe that there 'it will take a lot of work to make the soil good';<sup>243</sup> or, in other words, 'to prepare this wild, poor forest soil for wheat.'<sup>244</sup> The poor soil in the new settlement which has not yet been worked is contrasted with Matera's soil which, having fed people generations, is 'the best.'<sup>245</sup> It appears that the land must be cultivated, touched by man, in order to have value.

The soil gives life. Rasputin uses simile and metaphor to compare the growing of produce to pregnancy and the produce itself as children: the gardens, fields, and forests were 'ripening' and the Angara had 'ripened like a woman';<sup>246</sup> produce is described as the 'offspring of gardens and orchards.'<sup>247</sup> Earth is Mother Earth, both giving birth and sustaining her offspring. The idea of delivery is present too in the reason Matera's inhabitants return before the flooding: 'mothers and fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers, brought children, even brought along total strangers to show them the soil from which they had come.'<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Rasputin, '*Poslednii srok*', pp.158-9

<sup>243</sup> Rasputin, '*Proshchanie s Materoi*', p.565

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p.534

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p.533

<sup>246</sup> Rasputin, '*Proshchanie s Materoi*', p.579

<sup>247</sup> Rasputin, '*Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*', p.829

<sup>248</sup> Rasputin, '*Proshchanie s Materoi*', p. 545

Just as a lack of humanity upsets the balance of good and evil in the novellas of Rasputin, so the destruction of nature upsets the equilibrium of life. It is well known that Rasputin was a fierce defender of the natural world. As an environmental campaigner, he fought for the protection of Lake Baikal.<sup>249</sup> His concern for the destruction of the natural world, and the consequences of this destruction on human life, is apparent in his short novels too. Human interference with the natural flowing of rivers is an important theme within Rasputin's work. The narrator in *Poslednii srok* describes the confusion wrought in nature as a result of the damming of the rivers:

In recent years, summer and autumn have changed places: in June, in July, it rains, and then there is beautiful weather up to the Intercession ... People say that it is down to the seas that were made on almost every river.<sup>250</sup>

The monumental change to the river has caused monumental change in the weather, which in turn has caused monumental change and uncertainty to the villagers who are unsure when to dig the potatoes and mow the hay: 'nobody knows where you will find [crops] and where you will lose [crops].'<sup>251</sup> The use of the negative stresses the lack of certainty now in their lives, whereas before all followed the natural rhythms of life. The change that the Bratsk Dam brought to the Angara River is explained in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*: the Angara had changed 'drastically', the river banks were wider, 'neglected', and 'covered with slime' whilst the native fish, the grayling and the lenok salmon, had all died.<sup>252</sup> The use of the perfective verb '*izvesti*' in this passage emphasises the complete extinction of the native fish whilst the description of the 'slime' creates a sense of disgust in the reader at the contaminated water. This disgust at the state of the now rotting water is repeated in *Pozhar* where the river is described as 'overflowing with rotting liquid.'<sup>253</sup> Rasputin clearly denounces this change in the river and his narrator states: 'truth is a river [...], a river with clean water rushing forward.' Rasputin directly links the state of the river with man's fate, so as to help underline the danger caused by environmental damage. This link is made clear

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<sup>249</sup> Valentin Rasputin, *Siberia, Siberia*, trans. by Margaret Winchell and Gerald Mikkelsen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996) p.11

<sup>250</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.104

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p.104

<sup>252</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.719

<sup>253</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.671

given the importance of the river in the villagers' imagination. For example, Tamara Ivanovna believes that the condition of the Angara water, whether 'pure and murmuring' or 'slow and stagnant' has a profound effect on the 'fullness' of life of those living nearby.<sup>254</sup> This point is stressed further by Ivan Savelievich's reminder of, not only all humanity's earthly need for water ('nobody can live without the river'), but also its spiritual importance in the peasant mind, given that everyone drinks from the river and 'All rivers flow past God. He looks into them and sees all of us, like in a mirror.' The city tap water is impure by comparison: the 'stale' water 'sputters' out of the pipes 'as if from the underworld.' Nastasia in *Proshchanie s Materoi* reinforces the point, stating that, rather than tasting like the Angara, the water 'tastes terrible, as though it is poisoned.'<sup>255</sup>

The extreme effects of the timber industry are also explored. Rasputin plays with quantity to express the damage inflicted on the landscape: the timber industry workers are 'cut down thousands of hectares of taiga every year' and clear 'huge expanses' of land.<sup>256</sup> The area beyond the Angara is entirely decimated and this is portrayed again through the juxtaposition of quantity and nothingness: between the fact that the workers 'pulled up everything that they could', and that the machinery had become so advanced that 'not a single shoot remained' in the ground.<sup>257</sup> The opposition of bounty and lack is used in *Poslednii srok* too, to emphasise changes in yield. Liusia remembers how in the past fruit bushes were weighed down to the ground with currants, that you could eat currants until you felt ill and you could fill up a bucket in an hour.<sup>258</sup> The present day, however, is described repeatedly in the negative: now 'there aren't any [currants];' '[the blueberries on the hill] are gone too.' Whilst in *Poslednii srok*, Nadia is able to prepare a meal with potatoes fresh out of the ground,<sup>259</sup> this is not possible in the new settlement of *Proshchanie s Materoi*, which again is lacking: 'you can not get enough [potatoes].'<sup>260</sup> The significance of this lack is reinforced by the national importance that Rasputin assigns to the fruits of the

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<sup>254</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.730

<sup>255</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.626

<sup>256</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.650

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p.651

<sup>258</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.106

<sup>259</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.104

<sup>260</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.536



land (which are a product of both man's hard work and Mother Earth's wealth): the August market is a 'demonstration of Russia's invincibility' like the military parades, fireworks and decorations displayed on national holidays.<sup>261</sup> In *Pozhar*, it is made clear that neglect and destruction of the land has dire consequences for man's sense of identity: 'he never felt at home anywhere,' not even in his 'native land' and this causes 'pandemonium.'<sup>262</sup> Similarly, the city, detached from and devoid of kinship with the natural world, results in 'female misfortune and ruined lives.'<sup>263</sup>

## Religion and Symbolism

Rasputin's short novels are imbued with religious and spiritual symbols, as a reflection of the Slavic folk religion that is characteristic of the Russian countryside. Walsh describes the religious worldview depicted by the *derevenshchiki* as a form of *dvoeverie*: the 'syncretic blend of Byzantine Christianity and Slavic paganism.'<sup>264</sup> However, given the contentious and sometimes negative nature of the term *dvoeverie*, Eve Levin's more nuanced model of 'folk religion', summarised by Olson and Adonyeva as a system in which 'all rites and practices give people a sense of the ordering of the world, an explanation of the unknown, and a sense of identity', seems more appropriate here.<sup>265</sup> Whilst Brown reads the presence of religious symbolism in Rasputin's work as a 'search for values to replace those of a Marxist-Leninist ideology',<sup>266</sup> Polowy points out that the features of Rasputin's 'spirituality' or 'religious symbolism' - his 'depiction of pre-Christian as well as Christian custom and ritual, his use of symbols and images from both folkloric and religious sources' - are 'traditional features of Russian life.'<sup>267</sup> For Porter, Rasputin endows his short novels with a 'near-mystical quality' in his use of animal imagery, which almost represents the '[possible]

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<sup>261</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.829

<sup>262</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.690

<sup>263</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.707

<sup>264</sup> Harry Walsh, 'Christian-Pagan Syncretism in Russian "Ruralist" Prose', *Religion & Literature*, 27.2 (1995) 69-86 (p.70)

<sup>265</sup> Olson and Adonyeva p.250

<sup>266</sup> Brown, p.252

<sup>267</sup> Polowy, p.20

triumphing over the material world.’<sup>268</sup> Folk belief is evident in those characters who can be seen to uphold the traditional values of the village (with the addition of Andrei in *Zhivi i pomni*).

Aspects of Orthodox Christianity are apparent in the novellas. Believing characters constantly refer to God, pray to God or assign events to God’s will. Anna, in *Poslednii srok*, describes herself as a ‘servant of God’<sup>269</sup> and repeatedly says that God has granted her more time to spend with her children.<sup>270</sup> The villagers of Matera believe God sends them rain so that they can rest,<sup>271</sup> and Nastena in *Zhivi i pomni* believes that her pregnancy is a ‘miracle’ from God.<sup>272</sup> At other times, characters look to God for guidance. Nastena appeals to God: ‘God, teach me what to do!’<sup>273</sup> Anna remembers and follows the example of Christ who ‘bore his suffering’ so that man would bear his own.<sup>274</sup> There is an awareness of the Christian calendar: references are made to Christian festivals (specifically, Epiphany, Easter, Trinity Sunday and the Feast of the Intercession).<sup>275</sup> Graves are marked with crosses in the Matera cemetery,<sup>276</sup> and the village has a church, although it was turned into a warehouse during collectivisation.<sup>277</sup> Daria is aware of Orthodox ritual and blesses herself in front of the icon,<sup>278</sup> though others are less beholden to or less familiar with custom: Anna has an icon case but crosses herself without looking at it,<sup>279</sup> and Nastena improvises: she does not know how to make the sign of the cross so blesses herself in ‘any way’ and whispers a ‘long-forgotten childhood prayer.’<sup>280</sup> Nastena’s improvisation is a good example of the fact that, despite the importance assigned to Christian symbols within the peasant worldview, ‘the definition of what it means to be Christian and spiritual is not identical with what official

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<sup>268</sup> Robert Porter, ‘Animal Magic in Solzhenitsyn, Rasputin, and Voynovich’, *The Modern Language Review*, 82.3 (1987) 675-684 (p.678)

<sup>269</sup> Rasputin, ‘Poslednii srok’, p.202

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., pp.120, 121, 135

<sup>271</sup> Rasputin, ‘Proshchanie s Materoi’, p.549

<sup>272</sup> Rasputin, ‘Zhivi i pomni’, p.362

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p.334

<sup>274</sup> Rasputin, ‘Poslednii srok’, p.129

<sup>275</sup> Rasputin, ‘Proshchanie s Materoi’, pp.293, 481, 515, 609, 614

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p.485

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., p.477

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p.493

<sup>279</sup> Rasputin, ‘Poslednii srok’, p.124

<sup>280</sup> Rasputin, ‘Zhivi i pomni’, p.305

Christianity prescribes.<sup>281</sup> There are also allusions to Biblical images. Matera, an island that has two of every animal,<sup>282</sup> is destined to be flooded; an act which is equivalent to the 'end of the world.'<sup>283</sup> This apocalyptic narrative recalls the Biblical flood. The flooding of the island along with its elderly inhabitants however also echoes the Old Believers' legend of Kitezh which tells of an 'entire town that is believed to have sunk to the bottom of Lake Svetloiar, with all its inhabitants intact, as the result of a miraculous salvation from the onslaught of Mongol forces.'<sup>284</sup> The fiery chaos that permeates *Pozhar*, meanwhile, is reminiscent of hell, whilst the village in which Ivan's son lives is almost Edenic.<sup>285</sup>

Many critics have argued convincingly that Matera's Bogodul is a holy fool.<sup>286</sup> The concept of holy foolishness in Russian Orthodoxy originated with Saint Isaac in the 11th century and, whilst it waned after the schism, it has remained a significant idea both for the church and Russian culture.<sup>287</sup> The holy fool is an ascetic who contravenes cultural behavioural codes.<sup>288</sup> It is unclear when Bogodul first came to Matera though he is described as an 'ancient, old man' whose appearance does not change.<sup>289</sup> It is rumoured that his nickname is a distorted version of the Russian word for blasphemer, '*bogokhul*,'<sup>290</sup> given because his discourse consists of little more than that obscenity word '*kurva*' which, in Russian, means 'whore'.<sup>291</sup> It is also possible though that Bogodul, who is rumoured to be of Polish origin, might also intend the Czech meaning of the word: 'fuck it.' His behaviour is unusual: he walks around during the winter with bare feet and his feet are so hardened that snakes are unable to bite through them, much to the amusement of the village children, whose interest in Bogodul is also a mark of the holy fool.<sup>292</sup> Holy fools are characterised by their "strangeness" to the

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<sup>281</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.245

<sup>282</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.501

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p.477

<sup>284</sup> Link, p.143

<sup>285</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.677

<sup>286</sup> Link, p.174

<sup>287</sup> Harriet Murav, *Holy foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and The Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) pp.18, 20

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., pp.21, 25

<sup>289</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.492

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., p.476

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., p.492

<sup>292</sup> Murav, p.26

world'<sup>293</sup> and, fittingly, the men of the village think of Bogodul in a way that reinforces his alien nature: 'he was a stranger and an eccentric.'<sup>294</sup> The holy fool is however 'understood to function within the community' and 'to share in its central values.' It is therefore significant that Bogodul and Daria, Matera's main defender, share a connection and a sense of mutual understanding. Daria, moreover, recognises in Bogodul's lowliness a holiness: 'he really was like a god for her, come down to the suffering earth at last, testing the people with his sinful, Christ-like (*khristaranyi*) image.' According to Link, the adjective '*khristaradnyi*' refers to 'indigents who beg alms in the name of Christ' which thus suggests that 'the abject poverty and squalor of Bogodul's life is a mark of saintliness, the outward manifestation of inner sanctity.'<sup>295</sup> Indeed, the holy fool 'in imitating the most fallen man, is shown to be imitating Christ.'<sup>296</sup>

Animism and superstition are important aspects of the villagers' folk belief system too. In *Zhivi i pomni*, it is repeatedly questioned whether Andrei is, in fact, a wood demon ('*leshii*') or evil spirit ('*nechistaia sila*').<sup>297</sup> Daria, in *Proshchanie s Materoi*, denounces an official as an evil spirit.<sup>298</sup> Not all spirits are malevolent, however. The island of Matera has a Master. This small, catlike creature has been compared by critics to a *domovoi*, the Russian house spirit, which is convincing given the narrator's following description of the Master: 'if houses have poltergeists (*domovoi*), then the island must have a master. No one had ever seen him or run into him, but he knew everyone and everything that happened.'<sup>299</sup> Whilst the Master does not play a large role in the short novel, he is nevertheless a mark of a belief in spirits, and represents for Porter, 'the embodiment of the spiritual needs of the dispossessed villagers.'<sup>300</sup> Village inhabitants are mindful too of certain superstitions. In *Zhivi i pomni*, the bacon and vodka set aside by Semenovna to welcome Andrei home are left untouched because of a 'superstition': 'if you use them, you will never meet.'<sup>301</sup> It is, therefore,

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p.25

<sup>294</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.493

<sup>295</sup> Link, p.174

<sup>296</sup> Murav, p.28

<sup>297</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', p.324

<sup>298</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.486

<sup>299</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.511

<sup>300</sup> Porter, 'Animal Magic in Solzhenitsyn, Rasputin, and Voynovich', p.678

<sup>301</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', p.325

ominous that Nastena cuts off half the bacon for Andrei to have in secret. In *Proshchanie s Materoi*, Nastasia heeds superstition by wrapping up her samovar only once it is outside of her Matera home 'so that it can see where to return.'<sup>302</sup>

The representation of death and the dead forms part of this animistic worldview. Polowy agrees that 'Rasputin's treatment of death is a good example of how his characters feel at one within the natural cycle of things.'<sup>303</sup> In *Poslednii srok*, Anna believes that everyone has their own personal death that is a reflection of their living self: 'created in his image and likeness.'<sup>304</sup> Rasputin's choice of the phrase 'image and likeness', echoing the words of Genesis which tells how God created man, hint at a synthesis of Christian and animistic belief. Anna's Death is personified: the two talk to each other and have become friends ('*oni stali podruzhkami*'), even reaching an agreement ('*oni dogovorilis*') as to how Anna should die. Anna's attitude is in keeping with the 'well-established convention in Russian literature that portrays the "primitive" man, that is, the uneducated peasant or villager, as unaffectedly simple and accepting in his confrontation with death.'<sup>305</sup> Like the peasants of Tolstoy's *Tri smerti*, Anna faces death willingly and without fear. In contrast, Anna's children avoid or express discontent at talk of death.<sup>306</sup> This attitude is in contrast to that presented by Scruton who believes that 'a society in flight from death is also in flight from life.'<sup>307</sup> It is also repeatedly made clear in Rasputin's novellas that death is not the end and that the dead remain present. In the peasant worldview, 'the sense of connection with the members of the community that Russians call *svoi* extends to them after death. The dead - those who die a natural death - are still *svoi*.'<sup>308</sup> Like the natural world, in Rasputin's novellas the dead are capable of both judgement and action, and the living have a responsibility towards them. This is made clear from the Matera villagers' anger at the razing of the cemetery. They demand an explanation from the officials and are certain that the dead will require one too:

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<sup>302</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.523

<sup>303</sup> Polowy, p.23

<sup>304</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.213

<sup>305</sup> Link, p.22

<sup>306</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.110

<sup>307</sup> Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.137

<sup>308</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.280

'the dead will also ask.'<sup>309</sup> Rasputin's narrator voices the concerns of the dead too in asserting that '[the dead] were outraged'<sup>310</sup> which confirms the reality of this consciousness.

Traditionally, it is the women of the village community who are responsible for observing the folk customs relating to death: it is the women who prepare bodies for burial, sing death laments and maintain a connection with the ancestors.<sup>311</sup> It is the women who play this role in Rasputin's novellas. The dead are in communion with the old women and meet with them in their sleep.<sup>312</sup> As is customary in maintaining contact with the ancestors,<sup>313</sup> Daria visits the cemetery and speaks aloud to her Mother and Father, asking their forgiveness, but also for their guidance,<sup>314</sup> just as in *Zhivi i pomni* Nastena asks God for direction, as noted earlier. The unifying connection between man and the soil in which he is buried is made explicit by Daria who moves closer to and addresses the earth, which has become synonymous with her parents. The spiritual importance of this land which contains the human dead is presented in *Poslednii srok* where the village is described as 'sacred' because the graves of your parents are located there.<sup>315</sup> Daria receives a response instructing her to prepare the house before she leaves it in a process of cleansing and whitewashing which the narrator compares to the preparing of a body for a funeral:

You do not put a dead man in a coffin without having washed him and dressed him in the best that he has - that is custom. And how could she let go of her home, from which her father and mother were carried, her grandfather and grandmother, in which she herself lived almost her entire life, and refuse it the same tidying up?<sup>316</sup>

The house, which is made of dead wood and symbolically represents 'an extension of the self,'<sup>317</sup> is imbued with value because of human connection, just like the soil, and is prepared for the farewell with a process usually carried out before the Eastern Orthodox feasts of

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<sup>309</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.489

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p.36

<sup>311</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.283

<sup>312</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.514

<sup>313</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.289

<sup>314</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', pp.605-6

<sup>315</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.159

<sup>316</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.614

<sup>317</sup> Link, p.149

Intercession and Easter, celebrating the holy Mother Mary's protection and the rebirth of Christ respectively. The marriage of Man, Mother Nature and God, is made clear in *Poslednii srok* in the death lament that Anna teaches to Varvara from her deathbed which venerates both holy mother earth and holy mother church: 'What far country are you bound for?/ By the high road/ And the oak grove am I bound/ For my beloved church of God/ And its tolling bells,/ And from the church of God/ Into raw Mother Earth,/ To join my own kith and kin.'<sup>318</sup>

The representation of the Tsar Larch in *Proshchanie s Materoi* represents a similar synthesis of Christian and folk belief. The likening of the larch to a 'shepherd' watching over Madera and the villagers recalls the image of Christ as shepherd.<sup>319</sup> This association is reinforced, as Polowy notes, by the fact that the tree is referred to as 'he' (*on*) despite the Russian word for larch (*listvennitsa*) being feminine.<sup>320</sup> The larch is, moreover, compared to Bogodul by the officials who believe both to be 'abnormal.'<sup>321</sup> This comparison serves to fortify further the connection between the tree and Christ. The tree is likened also to the island's church. Both the larch and the church are positioned on high ground and both are easily visible throughout the village.<sup>322</sup> The top of the Tsar Larch is cut off by lightning just as the cross on top of the church was knocked down. In a further example of the blending of Christian belief and superstition, the villagers leave offerings to the larch at the time of the Christian holidays Easter and Trinity out of 'respect and fear' for the tree whose branches have witnessed a number of hangings.<sup>323</sup> Additionally, a folk belief tells that the Tsar Larch anchors the island to the bottom of the Angara river, keeping it in place. In the officials' vain attempts to cut down the Tsar Larch, the tree represents at the same time the strength of nature against that of man, and the conflict between the utilitarian rationalism and irrational spiritualism that the officials and the Larch symbolise respectively. There is

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<sup>318</sup> Valentin Rasputin, 'Borrowed Time' in *Money for Maria and Borrowed Time: Two Village Tales*, trans. by Kevin Windle and Margaret Wettlin (London: Quartet Books, 1981) pp.143-374 (p.368)

<sup>319</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.608

<sup>320</sup> Polowy, p.178

<sup>321</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.611

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., pp.477, 608

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., p.609

perhaps hope then in the fact that the officials are unable to complete the task and the Larch remains the 'one survivor' on the island.<sup>324</sup>

## Conclusion

Nature plays a major role in Rasputin's short novels. The villagers live in close proximity to the land and therefore have a detailed knowledge of and affinity to the environment that is their home. Life in the village is dominated by agriculture: the villagers are reliant on the land for sustenance, which necessarily makes their relationship with the land important, but they also find joy and purpose in the hard work required in caring for the land. The villagers emerge therefore as natural conservationists, inspired by both necessity and love. Domesticated animals, human habitations and the natural world are as much a part of the village community as its human inhabitants. The villagers' sensitivity towards and kinship with the world around them is characteristic of their animistic worldview, which is rooted in the pre-Christian beliefs that are preserved in the countryside, and which are followed and respected alongside the Orthodox faith. The natural world is, however, threatened by technology, as witnessed both in the changes caused by the building of hydroelectric dams and in the destruction of the landscape as a result of the increased use of machinery in maintaining crops and in the timber industry. As has been seen earlier, the Russian countryside is a point of national pride for Rasputin and the spoliation of the natural environment as well as man's increasing detachment from the land result in a crisis of identity.

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., p.614



## TIME AND PROGRESS

Rasputin's short novels are concerned with the impact of technology on the Siberian village and they question whether scientific advancements really signify progress. Rasputin's use of cyclical, permanent linear and apocalyptic time contrasts the stability and predictability of life in the traditional rural village with the volatility caused by the anarchic change that has left the village, and, arguably, the Russian nation, in crisis. The attitudes of the old and young in response to the 'progress' made in the new society are in conflict, where the older generation, representing traditional values, find themselves out of place in the changing world of the present, of which the young are proud. As the reader progresses through the short novels themselves so society becomes progressively more chaotic and unstable.

Conservatism, as Scruton understands it, means 'the maintenance of the social ecology', which involves the 'conservation of our shared resources - social, material, economic and spiritual - and resistance to social entropy in all its forms.'<sup>325</sup> Conservatism is, therefore, opposed not to change in general but to the kind of anarchic change experienced as a result of the Russian revolution. Writing in 1967, Deutscher described the immense change experienced in Communist Russia, with a population which shifted rapidly from being rural to urban:

The periods of intensive urbanisation were between 1930 and 1940 and between 1950 and 1965... In 1926 there were only 26 million town dwellers. In 1966 their number was about 125 million. In the last fifteen years alone the urban population has increased by 53 or 54 million people.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.ix

<sup>326</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Unfinished Revolution* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1967) p.43

In his short novels, Rasputin records the processes of what he sees as social entropy at work and depicts the ramifications of the large-scale social, cultural and economic change effected during the Soviet and post-Soviet period.

## Representations of Time

Time is represented as cyclical in Rasputin's village. For the villagers, time passes in synchronicity with the natural environment, as depicted in references throughout the short novels to the sowing, haymaking and harvest times that are repeated each year with the passing of the seasons. This connection to the natural cycle of life provides the villagers with a sense of stability and purpose. Link agrees that Rasputin 'portrays a world that is governed by a sense of the orderliness and completeness and ultimate purpose of all things.'<sup>327</sup> For example, Ivan in *Pozhar* remembers that when planting crops 'the same tasks [...] are repeated season after season' and 'you never finish tilling the soil.'<sup>328</sup> The predictability and pleasure that comes from this way of life is expressed in *Proshchanie s Materoi* where the narrator summarises life as a process of mowing, haymaking, preparing and fishing and that 'they lived this way for many years.'<sup>329</sup> There is a sense that the harmonious life of the village will continue uninterrupted as it has done for many years and there is no break between the past, the present and the future.

Time is presented as a linear continuation too, as in the representation of memory and the succession of generations. The importance of memory for the peasant is highlighted by Rasputin's narrator in *Proshchanie s Materoi* who states that 'truth is in memory. A person who has no memory has no life.'<sup>330</sup> Mayer-Rieckh argues that 'the act of remembering appears here as an unequivocally moral imperative which preserves the true integrity of life

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<sup>327</sup> Link, p.17

<sup>328</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.650

<sup>329</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.518

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., p.608

conceived of as a unity of past, present and future.'<sup>331</sup> Indeed, it is the memory of one's ancestors and one's homeland that ensures stability of personal identity and purpose as in Ivan Savelievich's tale about Lomonosov in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*:

A person is directed along one path from birth, from their parents, according to their ancestry and books deflect him on to another. Lomonosov left Kholmogory ... Why didn't he lose his way? ... He packed a piece of his native Kholmogory land in his bag and brought all of its laws with him. What about our children? They rush right into the thicket just as they are, without a ruler in their head.<sup>332</sup>

That Ivan Savelievich refers almost synonymously to 'parents', 'ancestry' and 'native land' gives further weight to the inseparability of the ideas of community, shared heritage and shared territory in forging a set of values. The comparison between the two paths of life presented by Ivan emphasises the superiority of the type of knowledge gained through a connection to people and the land over that learned in books. This idea is reinforced by Tamara Ivanovna who states that 'intelligence is [...] in how you live. Not in words.'<sup>333</sup> The relationship that exists in the peasant worldview between the dead, the living and the unborn echoes that described by Scruton, who argues that the long-term maintenance of the social order is achieved when the people view themselves as trustees of their world's resources.<sup>334</sup> Link also argues that in Rasputin's work, 'memory is the force that allows some communication between the living and the dead, between the profane and transient and the sacred and the eternal.'<sup>335</sup> The protection and guidance given by the ancestral homeland is highlighted in *Pozhar* where the narrator states that, in your homeland, every stone foresaw your birth, every blade of grass carries past advice and everything watches over you like your ancestors.'<sup>336</sup> The narrator of the same short novel stresses that those who died in the war in defence of their homeland left a particularly strong sense of positive values to their descendants:

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<sup>331</sup> Chiara Mayer-Rieckh, 'Memory and Wholeness in the Work of Andrei Platonov, Valentin Rasputin and Andrei Tarkovskii' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2011) <<http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1306765/1/1306765.pdf>> [accessed 24 April 2018] p.137

<sup>332</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.804

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p.765

<sup>334</sup> Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.34

<sup>335</sup> Link, p.41

<sup>336</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.656

the deceased at the front called for justice and goodness, leaving them behind with his soul and the memories that live among his relatives, and leaving them to be acted on and fulfilled; without knowing it, we, perhaps, twenty years after the war, kept this legacy of the dead, their single behest, which we, due to our human nature, could not but fulfill. This is something from above us and stronger than us.<sup>337</sup>

The reciprocal nature of the relationship between the dead and the living becomes apparent. According to Olson and Adonyeva, the 'unstated cultural imperative here is that living people must maintain contact with and show respect to otherworldly spirits, particularly the spirits of ancestors.'<sup>338</sup> The importance in the peasant's spiritual-religious worldview of honouring one's ancestors in this way has already been discussed in the previous chapter, particularly with reference to Daria's concern in *Proshchanie s Materoi* that she has disappointed her relatives in not being able to protect their graves or prevent the flooding of the island.

Just as a link between the past and the present is built through the consideration of the dead and the living, so a link opens to the future in the living's concern for the memory that lives on after them. Andrei in *Zhivi i pomni*, vividly remembers another former villager, Vitia, who died valiantly in the war. Andrei fears that his own memory will have lost its value because of his actions as a deserter: the memory of a person knows its own worth and his memory will 'be ashamed and hide.'<sup>339</sup> It is unsurprising that Andrei, who has become so obsessed with his own mortality, reflects upon his own legacy in this way given that the 'act of remembering is an act of transcending death.'<sup>340</sup> In *Proshchanie s Materoi*, Daria stresses to her grandson, Andrei, the importance of living well in anticipation of future death: 'Because memory remembers everything.'<sup>341</sup> As in the relationship of trusteeship described by Scruton, the villagers respect and care for the unborn of the future just as they do for the dead. Rasputin assigns a special significance to child-bearing, which, like honouring one's native land and people, gives man purpose and ensures the continuation of the world.

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p.663

<sup>338</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.268

<sup>339</sup> Rasputin, 'Zhivi i pomni', p.389

<sup>340</sup> Link, p.47

<sup>341</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.572

Nowhere is this more strongly stated than by Daria in *Proshchanie s Materoi* who tells the young Katerina that she was given life by God so that she could do her 'duty' of having children before being buried in the ground 'so that the soil remains rich.'<sup>342</sup> For Mikhail in *Poslednii srok*, child-bearing has a similarly religious and symbolic importance : he says "'Mother: you made me, I've made him, and he'll make somebody else,'" before adding with the 'wisdom of a prophet' that "'that is what makes the world go on.'<sup>343</sup> Mayer-Rieckh highlights the importance in Rasputin's work of the 'individual's duty to bind past to future through a continuation of both their own *rod* in terms of an uninterrupted bloodline, and the heritage of their cultural traditions and values.'<sup>344</sup>

Just as in Scruton's philosophy, this backward and forward working memory, which links the dead of the past, the living of the present and the unborn of the future, inspires the Matera villagers' conservative (and conservationist) attitude towards nature:

This land belongs to everyone - those who came before us and those who come after us ... It is not yours. In the same way, we were only given Matera to take care of ... so that we would nurture it and live off it. And what have you done to it? Your elders instructed you to live your life on it and pass it on to the younger ones. They will ask you for it. You are not afraid of your elders but the younger ones will ask.<sup>345</sup>

Daria uses folksy language that nonetheless expresses profound thoughts: she explains that the living have a responsibility to the dead and the unborn which encourages them to act as guardians of the land, which is absolutely in contrast to her grandson, Andrei, champion of the hydroelectric dam, who proudly declares in response that 'man is king ['tsar'] of nature.'<sup>346</sup>

The present day village of Rasputin's short novels, however, has entered what is depicted as an apocalyptic era. The world as it has been known is coming to an end. Whereas connection to the land and one's ancestors in the village provided stability, while memory

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<sup>342</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.542

<sup>343</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.218

<sup>344</sup> Mayer-Rieckh, p.136

<sup>345</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.562

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p.562

and the progeneration of man ensured a past and a future, the 'new' time has no past and an uncertain or, for the village, non-existent, future. As Scruton believes, in removing the dead from the agenda, the unborn are also removed.<sup>347</sup> Rasputin employs the river as a symbol of the changing flow of time. Whereas before the continual flow of the river implied that life in Matera would continue uninterrupted for eternity ('the flowing water seemed limitless, the village seemed ageless'),<sup>348</sup> the damming of the river, which physically blocks the flow of the river, also metaphorically represents the end of the village. In an apocalyptic image reminiscent of the Biblical world flood, the narrator explains in *Proshchanie s Materoi* that a dam was to be built on the Angara for a hydroelectric power station which would cause the land to be flooded: 'the end of the world [...] was really close for the village.' The hydroelectric power station, which, from the Soviet perspective would be seen as a symbol of progress and national pride, becomes in Rasputin's short novel a signal of destruction.

The settlement towns to which residents of the flooded villages migrate might be new, but they are presented as having no future. The settlement town depicted in *Pozhar* is seen by its residents as more of a temporary living place, like a campsite,<sup>349</sup> as opposed to the homely Matera, whose very name, which shares its linguistic roots with the word for mother (*mat'*), is evocative of Motherland. Whereas the way of life in Matera before had a seeming permanence in its cyclical repetitions grounded in nature's cycles, the inhabitants of the new settlement 'never laid deep roots' and, as a result of this groundlessness, the inhabitants make no plans for the future as shown in the fact that they do not try to make the village more visually appealing, nor do they build anything that would be needed in a permanent home, like schools. The younger generation who have moved away from the village are described in similarly abortive terms by Daria in *Proshchanie s Materoi* who describes Klavka and others of her age as 'fruitless seeds.'<sup>350</sup> The narrator in *Pozhar* uses repetition of the negative to underline the social and emotional deprivation experienced by the inhabitants of the settlement town who have 'no family, no friends, and no attachments.'<sup>351</sup> It is this lack of connection to people and place that prompts repeated references to a lack of clarity

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<sup>347</sup> Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.44

<sup>348</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.477

<sup>349</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.649

<sup>350</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.561

<sup>351</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.663

regarding the future: the residents are unable to imagine what life in the town might be like in the future since 'it was even hard to believe in tomorrow',<sup>352</sup> 'nothing in the future was visible until the very last minute.'<sup>353</sup> This transience is present too in the representation of the new style of work. Working on the land in the past was a cyclical and ongoing process. In contrast, work in the timber industry or on new industrial projects has a clear end and then a new purpose must be sought, thus reinforcing the precariousness of the current way of life with regards to the future. This uncertainty is seen in *Pozhar* where the narrator asserts that they can completely clear a forest in a few years using new, advanced technology, and consequently questions 'and then what?'<sup>354</sup> Pavel uses similar words in *Proshchanie s Materoi* to question what will happen once the Soviet's 'most necessary construction project' is finished: 'then what?'<sup>355</sup> Life is lived very much in the present, with no care or concern for what is to come.

### **The Village vs. The City and The Old vs. The Young**

Given the importance of the connection between the natural landscape and the life of the villagers, it is unsurprising that the changes wrought upon the physical world brought about by advances in technology and a sense of distance from nature have upset the natural pace and order of life. Consequently, man is depicted as having forgotten his place in the world. The change of pace is stressed in the contrast between the lives of the elderly and younger generations: Daria has lived in the same village since she was born and has observed the world for a long time without rushing ('there was no reason for me to rush') whereas her grandson, Andrei, is merely 'passing through,'<sup>356</sup> which gives a sense of an unanchored life. According to Daria, in the village of the past, people 'worked peacefully.'<sup>357</sup> She contrasts the unhurried life of the village, however, with modern times in the city: 'Run to work, run to eat. [...] So many of them running around! Like ants, like gnats.' Daria's use of short phrases is itself a reflection of the new frenzied pace of life. The fact that Daria compares the

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p.102

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p.111

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p.110

<sup>355</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.553

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p.550

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p.571

workers of the new socialist city to ants recalls Dostoevsky's use of the anthill metaphor to denounce utopian models of society. The Soviet communist regime is an example of such a society. It seems that, as man has been placed in competition with technology in the workplace ('everywhere it's like that: machines all around, technology in place of people'),<sup>358</sup> his pace of life, as described above in the words of Daria, has evolved to be more like that of the machine: it seemed to Ivan Petrovich that the town is in a 'constant state of readiness', given that the electric power plant and all machinery work night and day.<sup>359</sup> Movement also characterises the relationship between man and technology, advances in which have taken on a new life and reversed the natural hierarchy between man and machine:

Machines work for you. Oh no. For a long time they haven't been working for you, but you working for them ... Look how fast they run and how much they rake. You marvel, then want more. You reach out for them. You chase after them. Whether you catch up or do not catch up to those machines, others have been created.<sup>360</sup>

The generations are juxtaposed in their reaction to the new order. On the one hand, the young Andrei believes that these 'lively times'<sup>361</sup> bring the opportunity to 'see everything and go everywhere.'<sup>362</sup> Daria, on the other hand, views this attitude as a severe lapse in judgement: God sees that 'man is full of pride.'<sup>363</sup>

In his constant striving towards progress, this new prideful man not only believes that he can triumph over nature (as seen in Andrei's assertion that 'man is king ['tsar'] of nature')<sup>364</sup> but he forgets his responsibility as guardian honouring both the dead and the unborn. The breakdown of memory and oneness with nature is accompanied too in the present-day society by a breakdown in communal laws and values, particularly with regards to the family, the support and protection of which Scruton sees as central to the conservation of

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<sup>358</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.146

<sup>359</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.649

<sup>360</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', pp.570-1

<sup>361</sup> Ibid. p.551

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., p.549

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., p.550

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p.562



social harmony and stability.<sup>365</sup> Anna's children in *Poslednii srok* argue constantly,<sup>366</sup> and the reader strongly doubts whether they will ever see each other again once they leave their childhood home at the end of the short novel, just before the death of their mother. Kuz'ma's brother in *Den'gi dlia Marii* fails to return for the forty-day memorial feast after their father's funeral, as would be tradition, despite promising to do so,<sup>367</sup> and the reader is in doubt as to whether he will lend Kuz'ma the money he needs to save Mariia because she repeats with certainty that 'he won't give you anything.'<sup>368</sup> The separation of village and town, and old and young, according to their values or respective lack thereof, is underlined further through the characters that Kuz'ma meets on the train, which is itself a symbol of change and progress. Kuz'ma has an unpleasant encounter with Gennady Ivanovich, the Chairman of the Regional Committee for Radio and Television (again a symbol of progress), who shows little understanding of life in the village by implying that villagers are willingly lazy workers.<sup>369</sup> Gennady Ivanovich is rude and condescending towards Kuz'ma, who he mocks for having a 'country smell.'<sup>370</sup> Kuz'ma is eventually asked to leave the first class train carriage he shares with the regional Chairman, and meets an elderly couple and young man through whom the different attitudes of the old and the young to the institution of family are made apparent. Whilst the old couple he meets have been together for their whole lives,<sup>371</sup> the young man has separated from his wife and is promiscuous: 'I get a woman every time I go to town.'<sup>372</sup> Similarly, whilst for the rural woman, 'motherhood was a key rite of passage,'<sup>373</sup> Anna's urbanised daughter, Liusia, of *Poslednii srok* has never married and has no children. Respect for the institution of family has declined further still in the post-Soviet period as reflected in the fate of the pioneer cinema which Ivan the son visited as a child with his family: the pioneer had become a hangout place for 'drug addicts and school-age prostitutes.'<sup>374</sup> This social breakdown has severe consequences for the nation. As

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<sup>365</sup> Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, p.129

<sup>366</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', pp.96, 106, 126, 128-9, 130-2, 137, 143, 154, 208-12.

<sup>367</sup> Rasputin, 'Den'gi dlia Marii', p.45

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., pp.6, 7

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p.26

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p.24

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., p.64

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p.62

<sup>373</sup> Olson and Adonyeva, p.195

<sup>374</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.825

Mayer-Rieckh states, in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, 'social breakdown is explicitly and repeatedly expressed as part of a national collapse, and the destruction of a specifically Russian way of life.'<sup>375</sup>

The older villagers find it difficult to adjust to life in the town, which presents new dangers and difficulties. Some of the modern conveniences of city houses, such as hot and cold water taps and electric ovens, are thought of as helpful luxuries by Daria.<sup>376</sup> For the most part, however, the living arrangements in the new settlement towns appear more generally to be nonsensical to the former inhabitants of the village. Daria compares the positioning of the toilet and bath in one corner near to the kitchen in the new houses to the living arrangements of 'heathens.'<sup>377</sup> The houses were built with staircases that were 'too steep' which had resulted in accidents.<sup>378</sup> The same safety concerns are echoed in *Pozhar*: Ivan Petrovich's daughter injured herself carrying heavy objects up the stairs and was admitted to hospital and another person in her building was badly injured after falling down the lift shaft, which has been closed ever since.<sup>379</sup> It is not possible for the villagers to continue their traditional way of life in the settlement town. Nastasia tells, for example, that she has only used her samovar twice since leaving the village, where this was before a regular occurrence. Nastasia explains that it is difficult to use a samovar because there was no charcoal in the town and no space inside her apartment to light it.<sup>380</sup> The importance of tea-drinking to the shared communal experience in the village has already been discussed in chapter one. The villagers are also disappointed by the gardens in the town which are not designed to be tended:

in the courtyard, right up against the wall, there is a garden of one and a half hundred square metres, for which you have to bring in soil in order to grow something, because it is set up on stones and clay - and this was also strange: why is it so topsy-turvy - not a garden on the soil, but soil on top of the garden. And what a garden! One and a half hundred square metres - a joke! For the hens, by the way,

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<sup>375</sup> Mayer-Rieckh, p.160

<sup>376</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.481

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p.482

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p.507

<sup>379</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.676

<sup>380</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.626

there is a small pen, there is a small pen for pigs, but there was no stall for a cow, and there is no space to put one up either.<sup>381</sup>

The attitude of the villagers who embrace tradition to the new settlement town is summarised by Pavel who cannot understand the logic behind the town which was 'built - though handsomely and richly - with the houses so close together, line by line, and placed so stupidly and without any regard for human needs that you could only shake your head in wonder.'<sup>382</sup> Pavel's attitude underlines the inefficacy of applying solely logic to the planning of the town, without giving thought to the realities of life.

The way of life experienced in the town or city, or even in recent times in the village, is foreign to older village residents. Old Gordei highlights how people in the present-day village have become dependent on money and consumer goods, whereas before they grew their own crops and were self-reliant and self-sufficient: 'people can't live without shops; there was a time when people only went to the shops twice a year. They lived on their own food. [...] [Now] everybody works for money and lives for money.'<sup>383</sup> His repetition of the word '*den'gi*' reflects his assertion that there is 'money everywhere.' Nastasia in *Proshchanie s Materoi* also finds the buying of produce unnecessary and difficult: 'Life isn't easy there. The city is the city. You have to buy bread, buy potatoes, buy onions. [...] Where do you get all of these rubles?'<sup>384</sup> As was seen in chapter two, working hard on the land to produce food for one's family brought meaning and purpose to the lives of the villagers. Working for money, however, seems to lead to apathy instead. The narrator of *Pozhar* equates the squandering of money with 'indifference to absolutely everything' on the part of the spenders.<sup>385</sup> Money appears elsewhere in the same short novel as an actively destructive and devilish force: Ivan's younger brother, Goshka, was 'enticed' by 'the Devil' into working in construction and, 'with the big money he earned, he became an inveterate drunk.'<sup>386</sup> The prioritisation of money leads also to materialism and a rejection of traditional values in the new times.

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p.507

<sup>382</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.533

<sup>383</sup> Rasputin, 'Den'gi dlia Marii', p.42

<sup>384</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.628

<sup>385</sup> Rasputin, 'Pozhar', p.663

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., p.656

Whilst Kuz'ma, who represents the values of the village, had never considered himself poor since 'his family had all of the essentials,'<sup>387</sup> his brother, who has moved to the city, is more interested in luxury goods than his family:

They have a TV and a washing machine, but just wherever you look, they watch you like you'd make a mess of something, wherever you go, they follow you and wipe your tracks. They weren't interested in conversation. We don't mean anything to them.<sup>388</sup>

Klavka Strigunova in *Proshchanie s Materoi*, is unemotional about the prospect of losing her ancestral home and instead could not wait to set fire to her house so that she could 'receive the remaining money for it.'<sup>389</sup> Liusia in *Poslednii srok* appears more affected by the fact that she does not have a black dress to wear to her mother's funeral than by the thought of losing her mother: she 'ran to the shop to buy some material' to ensure she would be able to make something to wear.<sup>390</sup> Tamara Ivanovna remarks on this new obsession with clothing, describing fashion as a 'goddess.'<sup>391</sup> Materialism appears then in the present day to have replaced the religious and spiritual belief that was seen in chapter two to be so central to the world of the village. Women's use of make-up seems even to have transformed women into material objects: according to Stepan in *Poslednii srok*, city women '[are] all like clockwork dolls, one is similar to the other, there's no difference between them. They're not born, they're made in factories.'<sup>392</sup> This description is in contrast to Tamara Ivanovna's stereotyped vision of the naturally beautiful woman, whose attractiveness lies in her proximity to nature:

Beauty comes from the garden, from the taiga, from clean air. A beautiful girl doesn't need make up. Her face is white from cow's milk and her cheeks glow - from what else, if not from carrots; her eyes are clear - in the morning she gets up early and washes her eyes with fresh dew.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Rasputin, 'Den'gi dlia Marii', p.47

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., p.46

<sup>389</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.509

<sup>390</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.99

<sup>391</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.706

<sup>392</sup> Rasputin, 'Poslednii srok', p.2190

<sup>393</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.745

The introduction of a new set of values is threatening Russian identity. The baseness of this new set of values is particularly apparent in the post-Soviet classrooms of *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* where the adoption of new subjects and rejection of traditional ones reflects society's wider repudiation of traditional values: new subjects were brought into schools as well as foreign teachers who 'barely spoke Russian', and Russian literature, history and language became minor subjects.<sup>394</sup> The value placed on human rights over traditional communal law in the new society (with there even being a graduation exam on human rights called 'Humanity and Society')<sup>395</sup> seems to have resulted in a complete lack of discipline amongst the younger generation. Scruton is similarly sceptical of universal human rights which: '[belong] to the species of utopian thinking that would prefer us to be born into a world without history, without prior attachments, without any of the flesh and blood passions which make government so necessary in the first place.'<sup>396</sup> In Scruton's conservative view, human rights hold no particular truth since, being universal, they are not based in the communal set of values which naturally arises amongst a community sharing a territory. They therefore exert no convincing call to order in the absence of common obedience and rule of law, as witnessed in the post-Soviet society of *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, where students have no respect for the authority of their teachers, drink beer in class and take their school to court.<sup>397</sup> The spoliation of the younger generation is emphasised by the environments in which they now spend time, as though they have become vermin: 'train stations, markets, and dumps, [...] attics and sewers.'<sup>398</sup> The same propensity in the non-rural society towards universal logic and reason is seen too in the speech of the officials in *Proshchanie s Materoi* who refer in unemotional jargon to the raising of the cemeteries as part of the 'sanitary cleanup of the entire floor of the reservoir.'<sup>399</sup> The parodying of the officials' inhuman style of speech is a reflection of what Brown sees as 'an evident contempt for the "party language" of Lenin and Stalin and for official and bureaucratic jargon.'<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p.738

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p.763

<sup>396</sup> Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.23

<sup>397</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', p.763

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p.738

<sup>399</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.489

<sup>400</sup> Brown, p.375

The cleaning committee believe that the application of this same logic will help them to overcome nature in chopping down the tsar-larch. They use language that is reminiscent of Dostoevsky's underground man: 'two times two is four';<sup>401</sup> 'five times five makes twenty-five';<sup>402</sup> 'six times six is thirty-six.' Now that the Russian village has been irreversibly changed, the new Russia is entirely formed of new and foreign ideas:

And the race for foreign things was everywhere - in clothing and leather, in tea pots and pans, in carrot and potato seeds, in the teaching of children and the retraining of professors, ... in handheld devices and aircraft engines, in outdoor advertising and government speeches. Everything flooded in at once as if into a void, forcing everything Russian [svoe] into dumps.<sup>403</sup>

Rasputin's use of a long list emphasises just how widespread are the changes in society. In Rasputin's depiction of the importation of the 'Western' way of life along with television shows, language and magazines, Rasputin's 'conception of Russia follows classical Slavophile reasoning: Russia is everywhere defined in opposite terms to the West: moral as opposed to immoral, unified as opposed to divided.'<sup>404</sup>

## Conclusion

Life in the village of the past was structured according to the rhythm of the seasons. Time is also thought of as linear as in the progression of generations. The development of new technologies, like the hydroelectric dam and the use of machinery in agricultural work, has, however, brought an end to the traditional way of life of the village. Change in and of itself is not necessarily seen to be a bad thing. Rasputin confessed himself unopposed to electrification itself but opposed to the way in which it is implemented: 'I simply want to call attention to the roots of human existence, which may either be cut out mercilessly, or else

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<sup>401</sup> Rasputin, 'Proshchanie s Materoi', p.610

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p.611

<sup>403</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', pp.700-1

<sup>404</sup> Mayer-Rieckh, p.160

transplanted protectively.<sup>405</sup> It is rather the nature and extent of change, which, signifying a total break with traditional values, has caused an apocalyptic transformation in the countryside. This transformation has consequences for the future of Russia as a nation. Anatolii in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, believes the nature of the present times (with its 'abnormality and base, warped passions') rather than the procession of time itself that were 'depriving Russia of reason and identity.'<sup>406</sup> Whilst the development and implementation of new technologies in work and in the home are designed to make life easier by providing convenience and enabling increased production, they appear to have made life more difficult instead. In the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia expanding technology represented progress. For Rasputin, however, 'progress' has instead caused social instability, community breakdown and widespread apathy because of man's detachment from nature, his ancestors and tradition.

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<sup>405</sup> Link, p.132

<sup>406</sup> Rasputin, 'Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana', pp.856-7

## CONCLUSION

Valentin Rasputin enjoys a celebrated position in contemporary Russian literature and this can be explained by the conservative-nationalist turn in Russian culture and politics which reveres the kinds of ideas that are present in Rasputin's fiction and which constitute a conservative outlook. Across the short novels studied in this dissertation (*Den'gii dlia Marii* (1967), *Poslednii srok* (1970), *Zhivi i pomni* (1974), *Proshchanie s Materoi* (1976), *Pozhar* (1985) and *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana* (2004)), Rasputin charts the changing nature of life in the Russian countryside as he has observed it through the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In Rasputin's fiction, the breakdown and rejection of communal values and increasing disconnection from nature, which are caused by the introduction of new ideas and technologies, are seen to have apocalyptic consequences for the nation of Russia.

The idea of community is seen to be central to life in the Soviet countryside village: the mundanities of everyday life were experienced communally, and the village residents celebrate and mourn life together too. Community ties are built on the fact of a shared home, or nation, and mutual respect is borne not only of necessity but also of the genuine love and affection that comes from shared experience. Villagers feel a sense of responsibility both to their neighbours and to the surrounding environment. The communality of life depicted in Rasputin's short novels has much in common with the Slavophile idea of *sobornost'*, whilst the community itself resembles Scruton's nation. The harmony and integrity that is characteristic of the country village is, however, threatened by a nascent materialism which leads some characters to value money over the community values of generosity and helpfulness, and to prioritise their individual needs over those of the community (which includes the dead, the living and the unborn). This egotism is exemplified by characters like Andrei in *Zhivi i pomni* and the younger generation in *Proshchanie s Materoi*. The moral conscience inscribed in communal village mores appears to be at odds with an official legal system founded on logic. Russia becomes increasingly fragmented and individualistic, and the communal way of life of the village and the sense of love and responsibility that neighbours have for one another no longer seem to exist. Rasputin's communal vision shades into xenophobia and chauvinism in his presentation of outsiders,



who are seen as a threat to the stable order of the village, and the nation of Russia more broadly.

The theme of nature is as important in Rasputin's short novels as it was to real inhabitants of the Soviet countryside. Rasputin displays a keen awareness of the natural world and this is a reflection of his own upbringing in the countryside. The minute detail with which he describes the natural environment acts almost as a way of preserving the places destroyed as a result of the building of the hydroelectric dam, or by the effects of the timber industry. The villager who finds joy in working on the land which sustains him naturally feels affection for the environment and he emerges as a conservationist. Scruton also points out that, despite usually being linked to the liberal movement, the idea of conservation is, in fact, well aligned with conservative values, which seek to preserve the nation and all that that entails from tradition to the environment. A comparison of the physical descriptions of the village and the town and city, which contrasts the beauty and harmony of the former with the ugliness and harshness of the latter, has illuminated the damage inflicted on the environment. Land and animals are seen in Rasputin's short novels as part of the village community. Their inclusion is a reflection not only of the affection that villagers feel for the natural world but also of the animism that is characteristic of the spiritual and religious beliefs of the country village, which include aspects of pre-Christian religion as well as Orthodoxy. The unity of man and his surroundings is evident in Rasputin's personification of domesticated animals and nature, whilst Rasputin's use of pathetic fallacy highlights the synchronicity of the life of man and nature. Changes in the balance of the natural world therefore have an impact on the balance of man's life.

Technology appears as a destructive force which has power even to alter the passage of time in the village. Whereas life in the village was before experienced cyclically, in accordance with the seasons, and linearly, as an ongoing progression from generation to generation, the village has now entered apocalyptic time as a result of the changes brought by technology. The future of the town is also uncertain. The generations are divided in their reactions to technological and scientific 'progress': the elderly decry the use of technology which they see as destructive to the normal rhythms of life, whilst the young are excited by the new opportunities they believe technology brings. The elderly do not adjust well to life

in the city which, though made simpler in theory by the introduction of new technologies, appears, contradictorily, to have become more difficult. The traditional community values upheld in the village are notably absent in the city. The introduction of new ideas and technologies has altered the system of values and resulted in community breakdown and distance from nature, both of which lead to identity crisis, with repercussions for the nation of Russia as a whole.

Rasputin's resurgence in popularity at the present time appears to come as a result of a combination of top-down state sponsorship or 'encouragement' (as seen particularly in the Patriarch's involvement in Rasputin's funeral, his inclusion in the school curriculum and in the celebration of his life and work around what would have been his eightieth birthday) and bottom-up grassroots interest (as evidenced in the subjective and flowery language used to describe him by Siberian theatre workers on VKontakte). The traditional values and way of life that are depicted, and perhaps even preserved, in Rasputin's short novels are the kinds of ideas to which modern Russia would like to return and this explains Rasputin's popularity among the political and cultural elite. Through the depiction of the young Ivan in *Doch' Ivana, mat' Ivana*, Rasputin poses one answer to the problems of modern life: what Rasputin sees as a lost or forgotten, and notably exclusive, Russian identity can be restored through reconnection to one's heritage, either through working on the land, or reconnecting with the Russian language and history. Russia's leadership in the twenty-first century has increasingly appealed to a traditional rural-based national identity that finds its best expression in remote regions like the Urals and Siberia in its search to define Russia's new national identity since the fall of the Soviet Union. This appeal is reflected in the promotion and renewed celebration of rural literature like that produced by Rasputin, and in the example of images of President Putin hunting on holiday in Siberia which borrow from Siberian ideals of masculinity and proximity to nature. It would be interesting to examine how far Moscow, the centre, is appropriating a Siberian identity for a Russian identity today, for example, through an exploration of the literature of the new wave of twenty-first century village prose in order to gain an even better understanding of the role of village prose in contemporary Russia.

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